

***Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child
and Adolescent Psychology***

Programme Director: Vivian Hill



**Exploring the experiences of school exclusion for pupils on
the autism spectrum**

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Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

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Abstract

Children and young people on the autism spectrum frequently report a range of negative educational experiences and face disproportionately high rates of school exclusion, which can have a significant impact on their wellbeing and educational outcomes. The implementation of appropriate educational provision for these pupils is vital to ensure positive educational experiences and to reduce school exclusions. To date, remarkably few studies have explored the school exclusion experiences of pupils on the autism spectrum.

This study adopted a multi-informant approach in an attempt to understand the factors that potentially contribute to the exclusion experiences of autistic pupils. Information about the characteristics of the pupils was gathered to identify the range of needs for this particular sample, including their autistic features, behaviour, sensory needs, quality of life, and general cognitive ability. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with pupils, parents, teachers and local authority professionals to further understand the pupils' school exclusion experiences. Inclusive methodological approaches were used within the interview process with the pupils to help ensure that their perspectives were successfully gained.

The results revealed overwhelmingly negative accounts of autistic pupils' school exclusion experiences with detrimental impacts on the child and their family. The quantitative data in this study showed variation in the individual characteristics of the pupils, thus suggesting that exclusion was not the result of particular individual factors. Instead, these school exclusion experiences seemed to result from school- and system-level factors. Autistic pupils struggled to access mainstream schools and spent significant amounts of time out of education while their parents reported having trouble navigating the complex local authority processes in an attempt to secure an appropriate educational environment. Professionals attempted to promote the inclusion of autistic pupils but struggled due to capacity. Aspects of the alternative provisions that were successful for these pupils were highlighted, including a focus on individual need, an inclusive ethos, positive relationships and a collaborative approach. The implications these results have for schools, educational psychologists and educational policy makers are discussed.

Student declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Laura Gray

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1. Introduction

Government legislation promotes the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools and these schools are required to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to ensure they can meet the needs of these pupils (Department for Education & Department of Health [DfE & DoH], 2015). This is crucial for autistic individuals in particular as they have distinct needs which require specific consideration in educational environments, including social difficulties, specific learning styles and cognitive patterns (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b). Furthermore, many of these pupils have co-occurring mental health difficulties which require specific attention and support (Simonoff et al., 2008). However, despite 70% of autistic pupils being educated in mainstream schools (Department for Education & National Statistics, 2016), inclusive government policies are not routinely being implemented effectively, and therefore mainstream schools are often not meeting the needs of these pupils (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; National Autistic Society [NAS], 2017). Autistic pupils report struggling in mainstream environments, describing very negative educational experiences and high rates of exclusion (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b). Indeed, research has estimated that children and young people on the autism spectrum are, on average, twenty times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers (Barnard, Prior & Potter, 2000). These pupils are also experiencing a high rate of unofficial - and illegal - exclusions, estimated to affect around 45% of autistic pupils (Ambitious about Autism, 2016). Unofficial exclusions occur when parents are asked to collect their child from school or keep their child at home for reasons other than physical illness and these periods are not officially recorded as exclusions. These negative educational experiences and exclusions are likely to be detrimental to the mental health of these children and young people and may go some way to explaining the poorer outcomes

and wellbeing of those on the autistic spectrum (Humphrey & Symes, 2013; Parsons et al., 2011).

The implementation of appropriate educational provision is vital to ensure autistic children and young people receive positive educational experiences and that exclusion rates are reduced. However, Parsons et al. (2011) highlighted the current lack of evidence into effective and appropriate educational practice for those on the autism spectrum, with few studies including pupil perspectives on their educational experiences. Including the views of autistic pupils is vital in gaining a better understanding of how best to support them in education and this has been a consistent recommendation in recent legislative reforms (Billington, 2006; DfE, 2014; DfE & DoH, 2015). While professional and parental accounts can be helpful to consider ways to support individuals on the autism spectrum, pupil voice must also be considered alongside these. This is particularly relevant to autistic individuals who often view and interact with the world in different ways, therefore, the accounts of others are unlikely to capture these unique insights (Gaudion, Hall, Myerson & Pellicano, 2015).

Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as a framework, this research examined the impact of the different systems operating in the pupils' environment to provide a more in depth understanding of the complex social phenomena of school exclusions in one local authority (LA). Importantly, this study aimed to explore young autistic peoples' school exclusion experiences from their perspectives – alongside the perspectives of their parents, their teachers and local authority. Using this multi-informant methodology ensured a deeper understanding of these school exclusion experiences and highlighted wider systemic factors, contextual factors and current inclusive practices for young people on the autism spectrum in mainstream secondary schools and alternative provisions (APs). Additionally, given

the heterogeneity that exists in autism, the behavioural and cognitive characteristics of the sample were explored. This research may be used to inform education authorities and schools about how to create inclusive educational provisions which cater for the distinct needs of autistic pupils. This research aimed to address five research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of pupils on the autism spectrum who experience school exclusion?
2. Which factors contribute to the exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum from mainstream school?
3. What happens during the process of exclusion for pupils on the autism spectrum?
4. What do professionals do to support the inclusion of young autistic people in mainstream school?
5. What are the features of alternative provision that enable pupils on the autism spectrum?

To address these questions, this thesis begins with a literature review to situate these issues in context. Next, the methodology outlines the research design and process used to answer the research questions. Findings are then presented under each research question and discussed in the context of relevant literature. Finally, this thesis considers the conclusions of this study, with strengths, limitations, directions for future research, implications and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Chapter summary

This chapter considers the existing literature on the school exclusion experiences of children and young people on the autism spectrum. Due to the limited research in this area, a broader research base is examined to understand the wider contextual and systemic influences on the educational experiences and exclusion of autistic pupils. The review begins with an explanation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which provides a context for understanding the main factors across all systems impacting the school exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum.

2.2. Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) proposed that an individual's development and social experience is a result of their environment made up of a complex array of interacting systems (Figure 1). The microsystem has the individual at the centre and represents their daily environment and interactions, this includes their individual characteristics and home and school factors, such as relationships with teachers, parents and peers. The mesosystem encompasses frequent interactions between the microsystems, including factors such as home-school relationships. The exosystem involves the link between two or more settings and is a system in which the individual does not actively participate with, for example system factors such as county level support. The macrosystem is the wider cultural, political and belief systems, including government policies on inclusion and views on disability. Finally, the chronosystem accounts for transitions and shifts over time which indirectly affect the individual, these may include experiences across an individual's lifetime (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). When

reviewing research into school exclusion, factors across these systems were considered to ensure a full understanding of school exclusion.

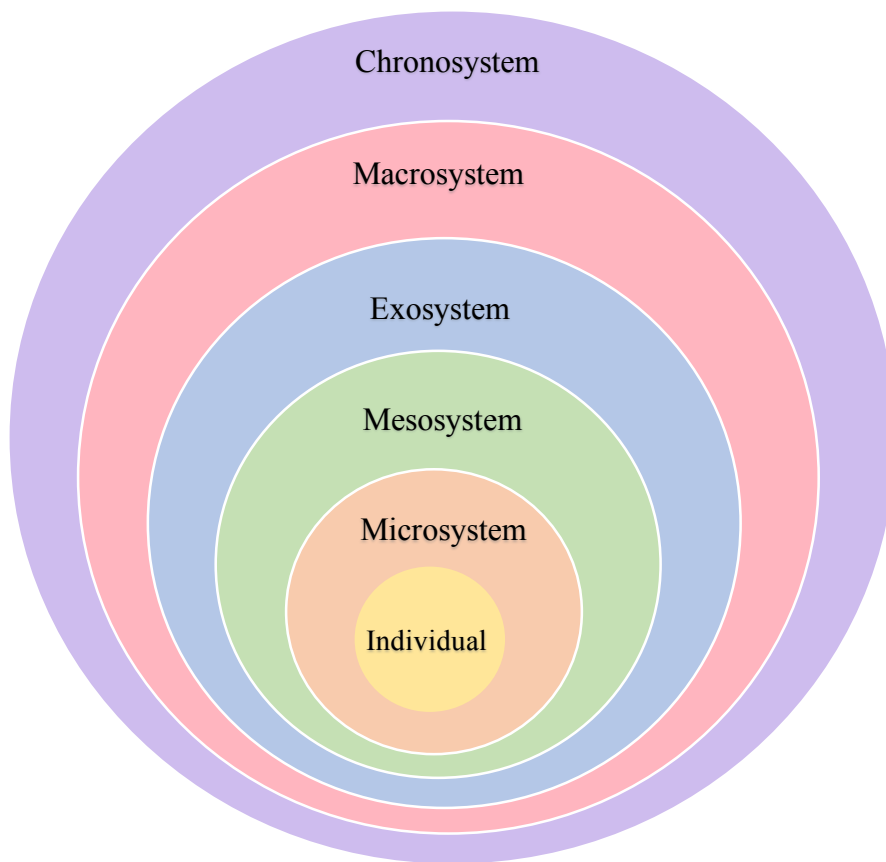


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

2.3. Autism

2.3.1. Definition of autism.

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition characterised by two domains of difference: persistent difficulties in social communication and interaction and signs of restrictive or respective patterns of behaviour, interests or activities (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Current diagnostic criteria (DSM-5) highlight that individuals on the autism spectrum can also experience accompanying sensory difficulties, including hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment (APA, 2013). There is, however, substantial variability in the way that these features manifest in those with an autism

diagnosis. To reflect this heterogeneity, in the recent DSM-5, the four pre-existing terms used for a diagnosis of autism (autistic disorder, Asperger disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder and pervasive developmental disorder - not otherwise specified) were replaced with a single category of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (APA, 1994; APA, 2013).

The introduction of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as an overarching diagnostic category is not a favoured term by the autistic community and researchers. Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) was proposed as an alternative, as the word ‘disorder’ implies deficit whereas ‘condition’ can be used to describe differences that include strengths (Baron-Cohen et al., 2009). Furthermore, Kenny et al. (2016) found that the autistic community preferred the use of disability-first language. Therefore, this research will use the terms identified as favoured by the autistic community, ‘autistic’ and ‘on the autism spectrum’, to describe children or young people with a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder or any of the previous subcategories that now fall under the diagnosis of ASD (APA, 1994; APA; 2013; Kenny et al., 2016). These definitions of autism influence the cultural beliefs situated within the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

2.3.2. Prevalence of autism.

Autism has previously been estimated to occur in 1 in every 100 individuals (Baird et al., 2006). The National Autistic Society has estimated that there are 700,000 people on the autism spectrum in the UK, which indicates a higher prevalence rate than 1 in 100 (NAS, 2017). Furthermore, these prevalence figures may be underestimated with some individuals on the autism spectrum remaining undiagnosed or misdiagnosed, particularly females (Baron-Cohen et al., 2009; Haney, 2016).

2.3.3. Models of disability.

There are two models of disability to be considered when interpreting autism as a disability which can be viewed within the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The medical model views autism as a neurological condition resulting from within-child factors and interventions based on this model focus on changing the individual to fit into society (Madriaga & Goodley, 2010). In contrast, the social model of disability places emphasis on the importance of society in constructing difference (Oliver, 1986). The current research considers autism using primarily the social model of disability, which proposes that it is the environment that needs to change to accommodate for these children and young people rather than the individual that needs to adapt to the environment. This fits well with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory which also highlights the importance of the interaction between an individual and their environment.

2.4. Inclusion

Inclusion is enshrined in educational policy stating that all schools have a statutory duty to provide an effective education to all pupils (Education Act, 1996). The government's Green Paper (1997) 'Excellence for all Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs' specified the government's commitment to inclusion (Department for Education and Employment, 1997). Following this, the Government SEN strategy (2004) 'Removing Barriers to Achievement', set out the government aims of including children with SEN and disability in mainstream education (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). Most recently the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 (2015) highlighted the importance of schools removing any barriers to learning, allowing participation of all children in mainstream education, unless there are specific

reasons why this cannot happen. However, it has been suggested that including pupils on the autism spectrum is more difficult than including those with other SEN due to the distinct needs of these pupils, and teachers feel ill-equipped to educate and include autistic pupils effectively (House of Commons, Education and Skills Committee, 2006; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b).

There have been some crucial publications supporting the inclusion of autistic pupils in education, including the training and competency frameworks developed by the Autism Education Trust (Charman et al., 2011) and the Inclusion Development Programme: Autism Spectrum (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF), 2009). However, these policies do not appear to be being effectively implemented in schools (Baird et al., 2006; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a). The All Party Parliamentary Group for Autism have found that autistic pupils are still being “let down” by the education system and concluded more is required to ensure these pupils are adequately supported (NAS, 2017). They recommended that, by 2019, a national autism and education strategy should be developed that includes staff training, reasonable adjustments in schools, a specialist curriculum, measures to reduce bullying and promote inclusion, as well as guidance to local authorities regarding provision. Importantly, they suggest embedding autism understanding through senior leadership and a clear accountability framework to ensure local authorities and schools adhere to inclusive legislation.

With regard to inclusion, there are two perspectives that can be seen as situated within the macrosystem that dominate in the literature: rights-based perspectives and needs-based perspectives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ravet, 2011). These perspectives differ regarding whether to recognise or not to recognise differences and whether individuals with autism should be educated alongside peers without autism (Norwich,

2008). The rights-based perspective calls for an end to all educational segregation arguing all children and young people should be catered for in mainstream education. The needs-based perspective argues that there is a lack of research and evidence base to support all children in mainstream schools and, consequently, there needs to be consideration of the distinct needs of specific groups to ensure the correct interventions are put in place. The needs-based inclusion position is helpful for those on the autism spectrum as it argues for the consideration of their distinct needs (Ravet, 2011). From this perspective, inclusion does not mean *where* a person is educated but rather the quality of education received by all groups of learners (Symes & Humphrey, 2012).

While the needs-based perspective argues for the consideration of the distinct needs of autism, there is a tension surrounding this perspective in relation to the medical model and social model of disability. While many defend the use of a diagnosis, there have been challenges to the use of the medical model of autism within the needs-based perspective due to the negative labelling, a perception of impairment and the problem seen as placed within child (Ravet, 2011). Instead there has been a shift to the social model of disability when discussing autism within the needs-based perspective, which recognises the role of the cultural context in the construction of disability and highlights both strengths and challenges as opposed to impairments (Ravet, 2011).

2.5. Distinct needs of pupils on the autism spectrum

In line with the needs-based perspective to inclusion and the social model of disability, the following section highlights the distinct needs of autistic pupils as recognised in literature. These studies are situated in context and include the perspective of pupils, parents and educators. This research moves away from the medical model which relies on the DSM-5 definition of autism and instead focuses on needs resulting from the

interaction between an individual and their environment. This approach recognises the children's distinct needs in an educational context and will ensure the research is meaningful for autistic individuals.

Pupils on the autism spectrum have a distinct set of needs which require specific support and a different type of pedagogy (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Madriaga & Goodley, 2010; Parsons et al., 2011). These distinct needs can be seen in the microsystem as they are unique to the individual or a result of the individual's interactions with their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The learning styles and specific cognitive patterns of autistic children and young people require thought and adaptation to traditional styles of teaching and learning. Autistic pupils reported a difference in teaching style affected their engagement and stated a preference for more factual subjects (Connor, 2000; Dillon, Underwood & Freemantle, 2016). These pupils may also need more time to assimilate information so they are able to follow a task or instructions as well as support to understand abstract language or language containing metaphors (Hill, 2004; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a; Ravet, 2011).

Autistic children and young people also struggle with the social complexities of school life demonstrating difficulties with social communication and interaction (Carrington & Graham, 2001; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Makin, Hill & Pellicano, 2017). These children and young people may struggle to understand another person's point of view, communicate how they feel or pick up on non-verbal cues (Carrington & Graham, 2001; Chown & Beavan, 2012). As a result of these difficulties, pupils and their parents have reported incidents of social manipulation, social isolation, lack of peer acceptance and bullying (Connor, 2000; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Humphrey & Symes, 2010; Makin et al., 2017). There is a high cost to young people trying to fit into the social world around them, pupils hide their feelings and mask their difficulties

resulting in high levels of anxiety (Carrington & Graham, 2001; Sciutto Richwine, Mentrakoski & Niedzwiecki, 2012).

Autistic pupils may also struggle with the physical environment of mainstream schools. Autistic children and young people often require predictability in their routine, which means that unplanned changes, a lack of routine and unstructured time between lessons or transitions can cause distress (Chown & Beavan, 2012; Morewood, Humphrey & Symes, 2011). Additionally, due to the sensory differences of autistic pupils, mainstream schools can also be problematic for these pupils (Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren & Pellicano, 2017; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Makin et al., 2017; Siggers, 2015; Sproston, Sedgewick & Crane, 2017). Students themselves have reported feelings of anxiety caused by 'noisy', 'bustling' and 'chaotic' school environments and highlighted a preference for low sensory stimulation (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b).

Autistic pupils may also present with challenging behaviour, exhibited more commonly than those with other learning difficulties, often resulting from anxiety (Dominick, Davis, Lainhart, Tager-Flusberg & Folstein, 2007). These behaviours can be difficult to manage as they can involve self-injurious or aggressive actions as well as non-compliance (Payne, 2010). Some of this behaviour may be a result of the difficulties these pupils have regulating their emotions as they struggle to manage in the complex social world and others struggle to manage these needs (Dillon et al., 2016; Payne, 2010). It has been recognised that individuals on the autism spectrum are more at risk of developing mental health difficulties, most commonly social anxiety (Clarke, Hill & Charman, 2017; Kussikko et al., 2008; Simonoff et al., 2008). Recognising and supporting the emotional wellbeing of these pupils and managing their behaviour requires attention to the environment, the individual and the interaction between the

two (Brede, et al., 2017; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is therefore vital to consider the distinct needs of autistic pupils to inform appropriate educational provision (Connor, 2000). To ensure the current research undertaken was meaningful, it endeavoured to consider the distinct needs of these pupils when looking at their school exclusion experiences (Howlin, 1998, 2006).

2.6. Exclusion

The latest statistical release of permanent exclusion data in England indicates that the overall rate of permanent exclusions has increased slightly from 7 pupils per 10,000 in 2014/15 to 8 pupils per 10,000 in 2015/16 (DfE, 2017a). Currently, pupils with SEN are over-represented in the rates of school exclusions and these pupils account for almost half of all permanent exclusions and fixed period exclusions (DfE, 2017a; Watling, 2004). Pupils with SEN were seven times more likely to be permanently excluded from school in 2015/16 when compared to children with no SEN (DfE, 2017a). More specifically, autistic pupils are, on average, twenty times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers; with 21% of students on the autism spectrum excluded from school at least once compared with 1.2% of the total population (Barnard et al., 2000). This figure is supported by surveys conducted by charities. The National Autistic Society found that over 25% of students on the autism spectrum had been excluded from school (Batten, Corbett, Rosenblatt, Withers & Yuille, 2006) and Ambitious about Autism estimated 20% of pupils on the autism spectrum have been formally excluded from education.

However, these official and estimated figures for exclusions may be underestimated as they do not include ‘managed moves’ and illegal ‘unofficial’ exclusions. Reducing exclusion has been a government priority and schools are under

pressure to use managed moves as an alternative to permanent exclusions (DfCSF, 2008; Gazeley, 2010). Managed moves enable a child or young people to move on to a new placement or programme in a planned way which satisfies the school, the child and family (Abdelnoor, 2007). However, there are no official records or regulations of the use of managed moves between schools or their impact on reducing permanent exclusions (Bagley, 2013). Therefore, it is hard to obtain an accurate figure of the number of exclusions experienced by autistic pupils (Centre for Social Justice, 2011).

Illegal exclusions are also increasingly being used to exclude autistic pupils from mainstream schools (Watling, 2004). These can include inviting parents to find another school, excluding pupils from school trips and events, encouraging parents to educate their children at home or sending the pupil home due to lack of staffing (Atkinson, 2013). Ambitious about Autism's (2016) campaign estimated that 45% of children on the autism spectrum have been affected by unofficial exclusions. Government legislation states unofficial exclusions "are unlawful, regardless of whether they occur with the agreement of parents or carers. Any exclusion of a pupil, even for short periods of time, must be formally recorded" (DfE, 2017b, p.6). Unlike a formal exclusion, an unofficial exclusion does not trigger the right for the child to receive alternative education. Alongside these exclusions, many autistic children often stop attending school, or parents remove their children from school, as they are unable to cope with the mainstream environment or parents feel their child's needs are not being met.

When a child or young person is permanently excluded, section 19 of the Education Act (1996) states that local authorities have a duty to provide suitable education for children of compulsory school age who cannot attend school. If pupils have been permanently excluded or cannot be accommodated by another school

through a managed move, they will be provided with an alternative provision. The DfE (2013) defines alternative provision as:

Education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed term exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour (p.3).

Alternative provision includes those funded privately or by the local authority. Local authority funded APs are called Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) (DfE, 2013).

Watling (2004) argues that we need to challenge the dominant discourses surrounding exclusions and carefully consider the purpose of exclusions and whose interests they are serving. Exclusion and managed moves can have serious effects on the mental health and wellbeing for pupils and can be linked to feelings of shame, stigmatisation and rejection (Harris, Vincent, Thomson & Toalster, 2006; Parsons et al., 2011). Those who experience exclusion are at a greater risk of experiencing negative outcomes, for example crime, unemployment, homelessness, social exclusion and poor mental health (Brede et al., 2017; Parsons et al., 2011). Exclusions can also change family life as parents may have to resign from work to look after their child (Atkinson, 2013). Due to these negative outcomes of exclusions, schools should be effectively supporting the needs of all pupils with SEN as a preventative measure rather than using disciplinary practices; such as exclusion, as a punishment for behaviour. To offer effective preventative measures it is important to consider how schools view SEN and disabilities. This research sought to re-dress the imbalance in research by interviewing key individuals from the different interacting systems highlighted by

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) to attempt to uncover the preventative measures currently being implemented.

2.7. Pupil perspectives

International and national legislation protects the civil rights of children. Article 12 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all “children have the right to participate in decision-making about their lives and that adults must facilitate all young people to have their views, feelings and aspirations elicited and placed at the centre of plans for their future” (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN), 1989). Recent legislative reforms in the Children and Families Act (2014) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (2015) support these rights and have placed more emphasis on gaining the pupils’ viewpoints on their education (DfE & DoH, 2015). The responsibility to do this often falls on Educational Psychologists (EPs), through practice and research, as they work under the SEN and Disability Code of Practice (2015).

There is an increasing emphasis in research that knowledge should not solely originate from professionals but should also be gained through clients, or ‘insiders’ who have the right to participate in decision making about their lives (Billington, 2006). Autistic children and young people may experience the world in a different way due to their condition and how they view and interact with the world affects their behaviour and their educational experiences. Indeed, as Gaudion et al. (2015) write, “these are people whose perceptions, experiences and interactions with their surroundings are unique” (p. 49). This unique perspective should be explored directly with the children and young people as it is argued professional accounts do not represent the actual experiences of individuals on the autism spectrum (Billington, 2006; Jones, Huws &

Beck, 2013; Mackay & Parry, 2015). It is vital to gain pupil insights to inform provision and practice as the views of stakeholders can be used more effectively to move schools forward (Parsons et al., 2011). This perspective fits well into the ecological systems theory as it recognised the importance of exploring the individual at the microlevel (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Unfortunately, the voices of these children and young people have often been neglected in previous research (Pirrie & MacLeod, 2009). Previous misconceptions about the perceived unfeasibility of gaining the viewpoints of these individuals may have led to this gap in research (Hill et al., 2016). The perspectives of individuals with developmental conditions are often unheard due to their social communication needs (Begley, 2000). Autistic individuals may struggle to express their views in typical interview situations (Winstone, Huntington, Goldsack, Kyrou & Millward, 2014). However, much of the previous research had not utilised inclusive research tools which are effective in capturing the views of autistic individuals (Hill et al., 2016). More recent research has promoted the use of appropriate tools to support all children and young people to express their views and ensure engagement (Greathead et al., 2016; Harrington, Foster, Rodger & Ashburner, 2014; Hill et al., 2016). Recent research has used a variety of tools including talking mats, visual supports, schedules and concrete activities to enable autistic pupils to provide their perspectives on educational experiences and aspirations (Cameron & Murphy, 2002; Dann, 2011; Hill et al., 2016; Winstone et al., 2014). This research therefore employed enabling research methods to ensure the effective participation of autistic young people.

Furthermore, there is currently a disparity between what researchers are researching and what the autistic community see as important research and therefore the findings fail to impact upon those who need it most (Pellicano, Dinsmore &

Charman, 2014). The autistic community want to prioritise areas that affect day-to-day lives, including research into public services, life skills, cognition and learning and the place of autistic individuals in society (Pellicano et al., 2014). The current research aimed to explore an area of importance to those individuals on the autism spectrum in their day-to-day lives; the educational experiences and outcomes of autistic children and young people.

2.8. Previous research on the educational experiences of pupils on the autism spectrum

A comprehensive literature search was conducted which is described in Appendix A.

2.8.1. School exclusion experiences of pupils on the autism spectrum.

There is a significant gap in research exploring school exclusions of pupils with SEN and only two of these studies directly examine the school exclusion experiences of pupils on the autism spectrum (Brede et al., 2017; Sproston et al., 2017). Other research which exists mainly focuses on factors within the macrosystem including the legislation, data and policies rather than the exclusion experiences of pupils (Munn & Lloyd, 2005). The few studies exploring pupil experiences of exclusion, with the exception of Brede et al. (2017) and Sproston et al. (2017), use special educational needs as an overarching category. However, for research to be meaningful, the distinct needs of autistic pupils discussed earlier must be considered, therefore this review focuses predominantly on the two studies exploring autism and exclusion.

A recent study into school exclusion experiences of pupils on the autism spectrum was conducted by Sproston et al. (2017), who carried out semi-structured interviews with eight girls on the autism spectrum and their parents. These pupils had experienced school exclusion and were attending PRUs. Parents and pupils commented on the difficulties pupils experienced accessing the mainstream school environment,

noting difficulties with the sensory environment, large class sizes affecting the pupils' ability to learn and pressures to attend school being detrimental to mental health. Participants compared these experiences to their current AP commenting on the smaller classrooms enabling pupils to ask for help, tailored curriculum, alternative opportunities, staff understanding leading to less pressure on pupils and flexibility to accommodate to pupils' needs. However, pupils and parents did comment on some of the difficulties they faced in the PRU, including anxieties surrounding transitioning and the influence of inappropriate classroom peers.

Pupils also discussed the positive relationships they had with teachers in their current provision; staff took an interest, valued them, were positive and they felt able to ask for help. Although pupils mentioned some mainstream teachers with similar attributes, overall they spoke of their relationships with mainstream teachers' negatively, commenting on lack of understanding, feeling judged and even being ridiculed in front of the class. Pupils also discussed the lack of support available in school or conversely being told off for using the support available. Parents felt unheard and described the lack of communication between themselves and both APs and mainstream schools. Pupils and parents also commented on peer relationships; bullying was cited and parents described the pupils' desire to have friends, sometimes leaving them in vulnerable situations.

Parents and pupils discussed the difficulties faced during the exclusion; parents experienced little or no support, long delays accessing an AP and lack of contact from agencies. Parents felt isolated and commented on the negative effects the experiences had on their children and their families. Sproston et al. (2017) concluded that more needs to be done for autistic pupils to receive positive educational experiences. Schools need to be proactive in developing inclusive environments; providing well trained staff

with a good understanding of autism, promoting positive relationships with families and clear transition plans for pupils if an exclusion is unavoidable.

Brede et al. (2017) also conducted a study that looked at the school exclusion experiences of nine young people on the autism spectrum and their re-integration back into an inclusive learning hub. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with the young people and an ethnographic observation of each young person in the classroom were conducted. Parents and teaching staff also completed questionnaires and interviews. Pupils, and their parents, described often harrowing accounts of school experiences that ultimately resulted in placement breakdowns and permanent exclusions. They commented on the social communication difficulties, sensory needs and desire for sameness experienced by the autistic individuals. Furthermore, the challenging social experiences were highlighted by both pupils and parents, including the pressures of being around other children all day, experiences of bullying and being 'wound up' by other children. Additionally, parents reported the use of inappropriate and ineffective approaches used by staff in mainstream schools when dealing with children's behaviour. A lack of understanding from the staff about the pupils' specific needs, incidents of bullying and abuse by staff, as well as concerns over the level of physical restraint used were all highlighted in this study. They felt the school system had failed them and an inclusive education was not provided for their children. Ultimately, parents described their children as being in a state of crisis, leading to mental health difficulties, including self-injurious behaviour and suicide attempts. Parents also commented specifically about their children's exclusion experiences; violent incidents, seeking control and not being able to stay in the same place were reported as reasons for the exclusion of these pupils (Brede et al., 2017). Parents had also experienced the use of unofficial exclusions and some parents opted to keep their

children at home to avoid further negative educational experiences. Many pupils remained out of school for a significant length of time.

Brede et al. (2017) found making substantial adjustments to the physical environment, promoting trusting staff-pupil relationships, understanding students' specific needs, gradual transitions and targeted efforts towards improving students' wellbeing promoted successful reintegration. However, there was an issue raised about whether the pupils were achieving their academic potential in the hub. Despite this study recognising the positive experiences of the hub, successful reengagement in education and the safety it provided the pupils, Brede et al. (2017) emphasised the importance of preventative measures to support autistic pupils in mainstream schools and reduce the high rate of exclusions. Brede et al. (2017) argued that school staff and educational authorities should create greater educational opportunities for these pupils; accommodating for their individual needs, creating an accepting ethos and fostering collaborative work across agencies to promote the wellbeing of these pupils.

These two studies have sought to fill the significant gap in research exploring the school exclusion experiences of young people on the autism spectrum. While Sproston et al. (2017) focused on girls' experiences the authors commented on the same difficulties experienced by boys in previous research. Brede et al. (2017) used a sample of young people in this study from only one provision and thus the generalisability of these findings about their experiences in AP is potentially reduced. Both studies ensured pupil voice was included, however, Sproston et al. (2017) did not mention the use of inclusive methodological approaches that may have supported the pupils during the interview process. Instead, parents were present during pupil interviews which may have affected how open pupils were about their feelings.

Furthermore, these studies did not gain insight from local authority professionals who may have contributed to an understanding of some of the wider contextual factors situated within the exosystem and macrosystem, and their experiences of supporting pupils who have been excluded across a range of schools. The current study therefore sought to expand upon the work by Brede et al. (2017) and Sproston et al. (2017) by using a multi-informant approach in order to explore perspectives from a wider range of systems as identified by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) and using inclusive methodological tools to maximise pupil voice. The study also gained information on the pupils' cognitive and behavioural characteristics at the microsystem which may also contribute to an understanding of what factors contribute to school exclusions.

2.8.2. School experiences of pupils on the autism spectrum.

As there is very limited research into the school exclusion experiences of autistic pupils in mainstream education, it is relevant here to consider how schools facilitate the inclusion of autistic pupils and to uncover the reasons for their high rates of school exclusions. The studies reviewed in this section include the perspectives of young people on the autistic spectrum, their parents and their teachers, which is relevant to the multi-informant research design used in this study.

2.8.2.1. Strategies for an inclusive environment.

Like Sproston et al. (2017) teacher qualities and characteristics have been highlighted by autistic pupils and their parents as having a positive impact on their inclusion. Teachers who showed empathy, positivity, respect, a liking for the child, took time to understand the child, seemed happy, friendly and smiled were deemed to be the most inclusive (Sciutto et al., 2012; Williams & Hanke, 2010). Additionally, pupils highlighted the importance of teacher-pupil relationships and the detrimental effects of

having a difficult relationship previously (Dillon & Underwood, 2012; Dillon et al., 2016). Pupils recommended classroom practices to support social difficulties, for example the promotion of peer support, an understanding within the school environment, teaching students what bullying means and allocating key members of staff for the pupils to talk to (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Saggars, 2015).

Instructional practices were also highlighted as important and seemed to relate to knowledge and a whole school understanding of autism (Dillon et al., 2016; Sciutto et al., 2012). Parents and pupils reported that school staff needed a better understanding of autism, needed to treat each child as an individual and use strategies specifically accommodating to their needs (Dillon et al., 2016). Parents emphasised the importance of meeting the needs of individuals rather than applying blanket policies to groups of students on the autism spectrum (Tobias, 2009). Individuals on the autism spectrum are not a homogenous group and so decisions need to be made on an individual basis (Parsons et al., 2011).

Humphrey and Lewis (2008a) also recognised the very wide gap between inclusive rhetoric and classroom reality in some schools by exploring the extent to which inclusive educational policy was reflected in practice. They conducted interviews with 19 pupils, teachers, parents and other secondary school staff, alongside lesson observations and other context and document analysis. This study was useful as it explored the wider systemic and contextual factors at play in the pupils' educational experiences by using a multi-informant method. The inclusive practice was affected by the ethos of the school, quality of the communication in schools, responsibility for learning, the role of learning support assistants and the way inclusion is understood.

The importance of environmental differences has also been recognised. A Personal Construct Psychology technique of 'Drawing the Ideal School' was used

effectively with autistic pupils who highlighted environmental features as one of the most important features of their school. These features included the building design and equipment, for example access to natural light, appropriate sized buildings, spacious classrooms and good-sized comfortable furniture (Williams & Hanke, 2010). This study, however, only elicited the pupils' perspectives and did not consider the teacher perspectives of the inclusive practice taking place in schools. Pupils have also suggested environmental considerations in further studies, identifying quiet and less crowded spaces within the school (Saggers, 2015).

These studies highlight some key inclusive strategies for supporting the needs of autistic pupils identified by the pupils themselves, their parents and their teachers. However, none of these studies consider all three of these perspectives together; neither do they consider the role of local authority professionals on facilitating the inclusion of these pupils. As mentioned previously, it is vital to consider the wider systemic and contextual factors from multiple perspectives to ensure the exploration of multiple systems as identified by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986). The current research used a multi-informant method and explored multiple systems affecting the social complexities of school exclusions to enable a deep understanding of pupils' exclusion experiences.

2.9. The role of Educational Psychologists

Educational Psychologists are trained in applying psychology to consider the impact of all systems operating which affect a child or young person. They have expert knowledge of child development and the impact of developmental disorders on access to education. The increasing prevalence of autism and the strive for inclusion means EPs are likely to be approached by schools for advice about supporting the inclusion of autistic pupils (Parsons et al., 2011; Williams, Johnson & Sukhodolsky, 2005).

Additionally, the position of EPs within the exosystem, working across systems, means they are well placed to promote the inclusion of autistic pupils and support those who have been excluded from school. Farrell et al. (2006) states that EPs work effectively across agencies by bringing coherence to multi-agency work which has been promoted in the recent developments to the Children and Families Act (DfE, 2014). These recent changes also require EPs to work with young people up to the age of 25 which means promoting the inclusion of autistic pupils in college, work and in the community to prepare them for adulthood (DfE, 2014).

2.10. Aims and rationale of this study

Current research highlights the negative educational experiences and disproportionately high rates of exclusion of autistic pupils. However, there is a significant lack of research exploring these school exclusion experiences. The current study sought to extend previous research by using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a framework to explore the operating systems around pupils' experience of school exclusion (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A multi-informant method was used to explore the school exclusion experiences of twelve autistic pupils in one local authority. Individual characteristics of these pupils were gained through questionnaires from pupils and their parents, and the completion of a test of cognitive ability. Parents were also interviewed about their children's school exclusion experiences. Additionally, teachers in the pupils' current APs and local authority professionals were interviewed about how they promote the inclusion of autistic pupils. Exclusion in this study included those who have been permanently excluded, undergone a managed move, been removed by a parent or have self-excluded as they were unable to manage in the mainstream environment. This research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of pupils on the autism spectrum who experience school exclusion?
2. Which factors contribute to the exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum from mainstream school?
3. What happens during the process of exclusion for pupils on the autism spectrum?
4. What do professionals do to support the inclusion of young autistic people in mainstream school?
5. What are the features of alternative provision that enable pupils on the autism spectrum?

2.11. Local Authority Context

This research took place in a large county in the East of England divided into four geographical areas for service delivery. The levels of SEN are similar to the national average, with 13.7% of pupils with SEN in the county compared to 14.4% in the general population, 2% of pupils have an Education Health and Care Plan or a Statement of Special Educational Needs compared to 2.8% in the national population and 7.8% of children have autism as their primary need compared to 8.8% of the national population (DfE, 2017c). The county's ethnic population is similar to England's ethnic population, with the following largest ethnic groups; 80.82% White British (79.75% in England), 5.11% White other (4.4% in England) and 2.6% Indian (2.5% in England). 8.6% of pupils in the county are eligible for and claim free school meals, which is low compared to England with 14% of pupils claiming free school meals.

This research was undertaken in a county where the researcher was on placement as a trainee EP. In this LA there are no special schools or secondary resource

bases specifically for autistic pupils. However, there are special schools which accommodate for the needs of these pupils alongside pupils with a range of other SEN. The LA has also recently offered free autism training from the Autism Education Trust to all schools as part of recommendations from an autism provision review within the county (Autism Education Trust, 2009). Within this context, and in line with current government legislation, managed moves are used frequently as an alternative to permanent exclusions (DCSF, 2008). There are eight APs for pupils who have been excluded from school or undergone a managed move; seven of these are support centres and one is a PRU.

3. Methodology

3.1. Chapter summary

This chapter details the theoretical perspectives and ontological and epistemological stance taken by the researcher. It also outlines the research design, data collection tools, data analysis and the ethical issues raised by this research.

3.2. Theoretical perspective

This study examined different perspectives using a multi-informant approach consistent with the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as a framework to understand school exclusion experiences. The systems are examined by including the perspectives of the young people, their parents, teachers and local authority professionals. It is also necessary to consider the young persons' characteristics and how these have shaped their interactions within education settings, their peer group and their school exclusion experience. It is important to remember, however, that these characteristics are also a result of interacting systems operating around the young person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

3.3. Ontological and epistemological considerations

A social constructionist ontological and epistemological stance is adopted in this research, which takes the standpoint that the world is socially constructed and shared meanings are created by groups, individuals or cultures through our interactions (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007). This position fits well with the researcher's theoretical perspective of systems theory, highlighting the different viewpoints adopted by individuals from different systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is therefore vital to examine multiple perspectives involved in school exclusion to fully understand the experience. This research therefore uses a variety of different perspectives to ensure the

experiences of school exclusion are captured through the different interpretations at play to create a shared understanding.

Shared meanings about the world are socially constructed and different groups hold different meanings. This is particularly relevant to the term ‘school exclusion’, which can be interpreted in several ways by the key participants in the process. Official government statistics on exclusions only include permanent exclusions that are recorded by the school. However, as outlined in Chapter 2, managed moves and illegal exclusions occur frequently but are not included in these official statistics. Furthermore, many pupils stop attending school or parents may remove their child from school when the pupil becomes at risk of exclusion or has very negative educational experiences. In addition, despite clear government criteria for exclusion, different schools hold different meanings about when and why an exclusion occurs. The researcher therefore must consider the shared meaning of ‘exclusion’ within this context. ‘Exclusion’ in this research refers to a young person leaving school due to negative educational experiences; this includes official exclusions, unofficial exclusions, managed moves, pupils who stop attending (self-exclude) and pupils who are removed by their parents. The role of the researcher in constructing this shared meaning in this research through data collection, analysis and interpretation is also acknowledged by the social constructionist perspective. Within a social constructionist stance, this research can be generalised to other autistic pupils who have been excluded from school.

While it is important to consider the different systems as socially constructed, it is then vital to approach these from a pragmatic viewpoint (Robson, 2011). The societal shared understanding of schools has changed over time with the growth in inclusive education and the current acceptance that the majority of pupils with SEN should be educated within mainstream schools (DfE, 2015). Yet, inclusion is more than

the placement of pupils within a school and for inclusion to work, practitioners must think about the shared meaning of inclusion in schools (Fox et al., 2007). Different schools hold different positions on inclusion, some are more inclusive than others. This perspective fits well with the social model of disability as discussed in Chapter 2, which places emphasis on the importance of society in constructing difference (Oliver, 1986). We must develop the shared understanding of inclusion within schools so that they better understand their role in developing school provision that can better respond to the needs and accommodate individuals on the autism spectrum. The inclusion of these pupils should be considered within a needs-based approach, as highlighted in Chapter 2, ensuring the distinct needs of these pupils are considered within an inclusive environment (Ravet, 2011).

3.4. Research design

3.4.1. Mixed-methods.

School exclusion experiences of autistic young people were investigated using a concurrent mixed-method multi-informant approach. The use of a multi-informant approach ensured the contextual and wider systematic factors were considered by gaining the perspective of individuals from all interacting systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The decision to use a concurrent mixed-methods design was made to ensure the research questions were answered fully, enabling breadth and depth of understanding (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Robson, 2011). This design was suitable as it aimed to address different research questions; the quantitative data addressed research question one and the qualitative data addressed research questions two, three, four and five (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A concurrent mixed method design allowed data to be collected and analysed separately to answer different research questions, but then integrated together to provide an overall interpretation of results (Creswell & Plano

Clark, 2011). Using one only type of data would not allow for the exploration of individual-, school- and system- level factors in this research. Qualitative inquiry was the dominant method used as much of the data were collected through interviews. Quantitative data were used to supplement the qualitative data, providing information on the characteristics of the sample of young people included in this study. Autism varies considerably from child to child (APA, 2013) and so it was imperative to describe the young people's characteristics and determine the effects these characteristics might have on their experiences of school exclusion. It was important to consider whether autistic pupils excluded from school display a particular set of characteristics which lead to further difficulties accessing mainstream school and resulting in exclusion. Autistic pupils excluded from school may show more learning needs, higher sensory needs and more emotional difficulties making mainstream educational environments more challenging for this group of pupils compared to children with autism more broadly. The researcher acknowledges that these characteristics are within the microsystem and result from the young peoples' interactions with their immediate environment. This multi-informant approach and concurrent mixed-methods design has helped provide a unique contribution to the gap in evidence on school exclusion of those on the autism spectrum.

3.4.2. Recruitment of participants.

Headteachers of all eight APs in the county were contacted and asked to participate in the research. Two APs agreed to take part in the study. Once consent for participation was gained from the headteacher (Appendix B), school staff identified relevant students who fit the inclusion criteria for the study; those with a diagnosis of an ASD who had experienced a school exclusion from a mainstream provision and now attend an AP. The young people were identified and their parents were then given an information

sheet and consent form by school staff and asked to participate in the study (Appendix C and D). Staff members in the APs were also asked for their participation in the study (Appendix E). All Educational Psychologists and Specialist Autism Teachers who work for the local authority were contacted by email and provided with an information sheet and consent form and asked for their participation in the study (Appendix F).

Parent participants were asked whether they would be willing for the researcher to contact their children's previous schools, where their child had experienced exclusion. This would have gained teacher perspectives about the schools' inclusive practices and pupils' experiences of exclusion. The majority of parents said they would not like the researcher to contact their children's previous schools, some parents stated this would make them or their child feel uncomfortable. The researcher felt to ensure the study was ethically sound, it was necessary to exclude the previous teachers from the study so the parents and pupils felt safe to continue with the research.

Provision one is an AP, one of the seven support centres in the county, with 37 pupils on roll (April 2018). The provision takes students in Year 7, 8 and 9 initially for a 12-week part-time programme aimed at gathering information towards an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). They offer support, advice and guidance to the pupil's mainstream school and parents, and the pupils continue to attend their mainstream school part-time where possible. Pupils in Year 9, 10 and 11 attend the provision part-time and enrol for virtual learning part-time. The student timetables are a mixture of lessons, e-learning and off-site provision. All students have an individualised curriculum and the provision aims to support pupils back into mainstream school or on to an AP by applying for an EHCP. Some pupils remain in the provision for the rest of their school careers if a suitable alternative is not available or reintegration is unsuccessful. This provision has no specialism in autism and only a handful of their

students are on the autism spectrum. Pupils are referred to this provision from their mainstream school, an outside agency or through a professional panel who make decisions about the provision for pupils who have been excluded from school. The school received an outstanding rating from Ofsted in 2014.

Provision two is the only PRU in the county and has 39 pupils on roll (April 2018). The majority of students attending this provision are on the autism spectrum, others have social emotional and mental health needs and some have co-occurring conditions. The provision offers full-time personalised education packages for pupils who have had limited engagement with education, having been excluded or self-excluded, but show academic potential. There is a strong academic focus in the provision. In 2014 Ofsted reported that students with ASD in this provision “make outstanding progress towards their targets in English, Mathematics, Science and Computing”. Pupils are required to have an EHCP and referrals are made via an SEN provision panel. Pupils who gain a place at this provision are expected to stay until age 16 and then individual and financial decisions are made about places for sixth form. This provision is unique within the county and has become specialist for autistic pupils. It has been awarded autism accreditation, which is an autism-specific quality assurance measure for organisations awarded by the National Autistic Society and has recently won an Autism Accreditation Excellence Award. This provision received a good rating from Ofsted in 2014.

3.4.3. Sample.

The final sample consisted of 39 participants; 12 pupils, ten parents, eight Teachers, six Educational Psychologists and three Specialist Autism Teachers.

3.4.3.1. Pupil participants.

Young people attending APs in the LA were purposively sampled to take part in this research. Two pupils attended Provision one and ten pupils attended Provision two. This study included 12 pupils (10 male, 2 female) aged between 13 years 8 months and 17 years and 11 months (M (months) = 188.83; SD = 15.18) with a parent reported clinical diagnosis of an ASD and who were attending an AP for secondary school aged children in the local authority. One pupil had not received a formal diagnosis of autism but was included in this study as (1) his parents and school staff felt he demonstrated clinically-significant levels of autistic features but they had decided not to pursue an official diagnosis; and (2) he also scored above the cut-off point (score of 20) on the Social Communication Questionnaire (Rutter, Bailey & Lord, 2003), a screening tool used for autism.

Pupils had previously attended several different mainstream schools across the county. Nine pupils were white British, two pupils were white Irish and one pupil had a mixed background. One pupil was adopted and another pupil was living in foster care. Four pupils had self-excluded because of anxiety from negative educational experiences, one pupil had received an unofficial exclusion which led to the parent removing the child from school, four pupils experienced managed moves and three pupils received permanent exclusions. Seven of the pupils have co-occurring diagnoses. Individual details of the participants are presented in Table 1 and further pupil information can be found in Appendix G. Eleven pupils took part in all aspects of the study; questionnaires, interview and a cognitive ability test. One pupil did not want to complete the questionnaires.

Table 1. Pupil participant details

Pupil	Age (yrs)	Gender	Ethnicity	Diagnosis Parent report	Parent Participant	Type of exclusion
PU1	15.2	Male	WB	ADHD	Mother (PA1)	Managed move
PU2	16.7	Male	WB	ASD	Father (PA2)	Managed move
PU3	16.9	Male	WB	Asperger Syndrome	Mother (PA5)	Permanent exclusion
PU4	13.8	Male	Mixed	Autism, Tics, ADHD	Adoptive mother (PA3)	Permanent exclusion
PU5	17.11	Male	WB	ASD/ APD	Mother (PA4)	Self -excluded
PU6	15.3	Male	WI	ASD	Mother (PA6)	Managed move
PU7	14.7	Female	Mixed	Autism	-	Self-excluded
PU8	14.3	Male	WB	ASD/ADHD/ Dyspraxia	Mother (PA7)	Removed by parent
PU9	17.3	Male	WB	HFA, Motor tics, Anxiety, Microdeletion of chromosome	Mother (PA9)	Self-excluded
PU10	15.7	Male	WB	ASD/ DAD	Foster mother (PA8)	Permanent exclusion
PU11	15.6	Female	WB	Autism,	-	Managed move
PU12	16.4	Male	WI	Autism, Dyspraxia, Dyslexia	Mother (PA10)	Self -excluded

Notes: WB: White British; WI: White Irish; Mixed: Mixed ethnic background. ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder; HFA: High functioning Autism; APD: Auditory Processing Disorder; ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; DAD: Disorganised Attachment Disorder

3.4.3.2. Parent participants.

This study included ten parent participants (9 mothers, 1 father). Two parents did not respond to requests for involvement. Eight were biological parents of the pupil

participants, one was an adoptive parent and one a foster parent. All ten parent participants took part in an interview and completed the questionnaires. Child 10 had not been living with his foster parent at the time of his exclusion so his foster parent was unable to answer some questions on the interview schedule.

3.4.3.3. Teacher participants.

Fourteen teachers were invited to take part in the study and eight teachers consented; three from provision one and five from provision two (4 males, 4 females). Length of experience working in the provision ranged from 2 years to 12 years ($M(\text{months})=59.13$; $SD=44.59$). Many teachers had additional experience working previously in mainstream schools. All were teaching staff except one who was the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and did not have a teaching role. The teachers included two Humanities teachers, two English teachers, a Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education teacher, a Science teacher and teacher of Vocational Studies. One teacher was also Deputy Head, one was Autism Lead in the provision, two were associate members of the Senior Leadership Team with lead roles in Pastoral Care and Curriculum and Training. All teachers took on a mentoring role for a least one pupil in the school.

3.4.3.4. Educational Psychologist participants.

Thirty-Nine Educational Psychologists were invited to take part in the study and six volunteered (6 females). Four of these were from one team in the county and two were from another team within the county. Length of experience in the role ranged from 2 years to 24 years ($M(\text{months})=150$; $SD=90.68$).

3.4.3.5. Specialist Autism Teacher participants.

Sixteen Specialist Autism Teachers were invited to take part in the study and three volunteered (3 females). One Specialist Autism Teacher was from one team in the

county and two were from another team in the county. Length of experience in the role ranged from 1.5 years to 4 years (M (months)=30; SD =12.96).

3.5. Data collection

Using a concurrent mixed-methods design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time. Young people on the autism spectrum completed the Wechsler Abbreviated Scales of Intelligence – 2nd edition (WASI-II) (Wechsler, 2011), the Paediatric Quality of Life Questionnaire (Varni, Seid & Rode, 1999), the Adult/Adolescent Sensory Profile (Brown & Dunn, 2002) and took part in a semi-structured interview which included the Life Grid activity and Drawing the Ideal School. Dependent on individual need and school timetable, some pupils completed all tasks in one meeting and others met the researcher twice, completing the questionnaires and WASI-II on one occasion and the interview on a second occasion. The parents of the young people completed the Social Communication Questionnaire (Rutter et al., 2003), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) and took part in a semi-structured interview. Parents also completed two questionnaires to provide background information, including ethnicity, gender, diagnosis information and previous school placements. Five parents completed the questionnaires with the researcher and five parents returned questionnaires by email or post. The teachers, Educational Psychologists and Specialist Autism Teachers completed semi-structured interviews only.

3.5.1. Quantitative data.

Quantitative data were gathered to characterise the population of children in the study and address research question one. Scoring of the WASI-II and questionnaires was carried out following the manual instructions.

3.5.1.1. Social Communication Questionnaire.

Parents completed the Social Communication Questionnaire (SCQ) about their child, which is a screening tool for autism (Rutter et al., 2003). The SCQ is a 40-item questionnaire with a cut-off score that can be used to indicate the likelihood that an individual is on the autism spectrum. Higher scores indicate greater autistic symptomatology. Scores above a cut-off of 15 suggest the individual is likely to have ASD and prompt further assessment. Validation studies indicate that the SCQ, with a cut-off point of 15, is an accurate screener of ASD with sensitivity of 0.85 and specificity of 0.75 (Rutter et al., 2003). SCQs were completed on nine pupils, two parents did not take part and one foster parent was unable to complete the questionnaire due to lack of information about her son's behaviour at a young age.

3.5.1.2. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.

Parents also completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which is a brief behavioural screening measure for children and adolescents (Goodman, 1997). The parent-report SDQ is a 25-item measure, which divides into five scales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviour. A score is created for each of the five scales as well as a total difficulties score, which is created by summing four of the five scales (all but pro-social behaviour). The SDQ also has an additional subscale that assesses the impact of the reported difficulties. Higher total scores are indicative of an increased level of behavioural difficulties. The SDQ parent report has good psychometric properties; reliability statistics range between 0.57 and 0.85 (alpha coefficients) (Goodman, 2001). It has good validity as the scores are strongly associated with the presence or absence of psychiatric disorders (Goodman, 2001). The SDQ was completed with 10 pupils used in this research and used to identify any behaviour difficulties experienced.

3.5.1.3. Adult / Adolescent Sensory Profile (AASP).

Pupils also completed the self-report Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile (AASP), which is suitable for individuals aged 11+ years to measure sensory needs (Brown & Dunn, 2002). It is a 60-item questionnaire including 7 sensory modalities: taste/smell, movement, visual, auditory, touch and activity level measuring individual responses to sensory events. The scores of these 60 items were summed to provide total scores in four domains; low registration (passive behavioural responses associated with a high neurological threshold, for example missing stimuli or responding slowly), sensation seeking (active behavioural responses associated with a high neurological threshold, for example pursuit of sensory stimuli), sensation avoiding (active behaviour responses associated with a low neurological threshold, for example deliberate acts to reduce exposure to sensory stimuli) and sensory sensitivity (passive behavioural responses associated with a low neurological threshold, distraction and discomfort from sensory stimuli). Higher or lower quadrant scores reflect more sensory differences in that area. The AASP has been shown to have strong psychometric properties; reliability statistics for the quadrants of the AASP range between 0.65 and 0.75 (alpha coefficients) for the adolescent population (Brown & Dunn, 2002). The AASP has been successfully used in research involving individuals on the autism spectrum (Crane, Goddard & Pring, 2009). The AASP was completed by nine pupils, two pupils did not take part and one questionnaire was excluded due to missing data.

3.5.1.4. Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence – 2nd edition.

Young people on the autism spectrum were administered the two sub-test version (Vocabulary and Matrix Reasoning subtests) of the WASI-II measure of cognitive ability (Wechsler, 2011). This provided information about the young people's general intellectual functioning. This cognitive ability test has been standardised on children

including those with SEN (McCrimmon & Smith, 2013). Excellent psychometric properties have been established, reliability statistics for the FSIQ-2 composite are 0.93 for the child sample and 0.94 for the adult sample (alpha coefficients) (Wechsler, 2011). Concurrent validity was established through correlations between the WASI-II and the original WASI, WISC-IV, and WAIS-IV; these were acceptable (0.71) to excellent (0.92) (Wechsler, 2011). All pupils completed the WASI-II to assess their levels of cognitive ability.

3.5.1.5. Paediatric Quality of Life Inventory.

Pupils were asked to complete the Paediatric Quality of Life Inventory (PedsQL), which measures health-related quality of life in children and adolescents (Varni et al., 1999). This is a 23-item self-report measure and provides scores on core dimensions of health as delineated by the World Health Organisation: physical, emotional and social, as well as school functioning. It creates a total score, physical health summary score and psychosocial health summary score. Higher scores reflect better quality of life. The PedsQL was found to be the most commonly used measure of quality of life in children and youth with ASD (Ikeda, Hinckson & Krageloh, 2014). The self-report measure has good psychometric properties established in children and youth with ASD. Reliability statistics range between 0.71 and 0.93 (alpha coefficients) and good validity was demonstrated through strong correlations between other mental health measures (Shipman, Sheldrick & Perrin, 2011). Eleven pupils completed the Peds QL Inventory.

3.5.1.6. Quantitative data analysis.

Questionnaires and the WASI-II provided information on the type of behaviour, autism features, sensory needs, quality of life and cognitive ability of the sample. Questionnaire data were scored for the sample and compared to population norms

which helped the researcher understand the distinct characteristics of the sample. Quantitative data were analysed via SPSS 25 (IBM, 2017).

3.5.2. Qualitative data.

3.5.2.1. Designing semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research as they promote exploration of individual experience. Led by the participant, these interviews were a useful tool for exploring how the participants made sense of their experience, allowing depth in their answers to tell their story (Mertens, 2005; Robson, 2011). Pre-determined open questions were used which allowed flexibility in their responses and gave the opportunity for participants to share insights that the researcher had not considered (Robson, 2011). More structured interviews may not have allowed for such individual responses. Separate interview schedules were designed for each group of participants (see Appendices H-L). Interview schedules were developed from the aims of this study after reviewing similar research (Bagley, 2013; Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren & Pellicano, 2016). As the research aimed to understand the individuals' unique experiences of exclusion, interviews were all completed individually, which allowed each participant to consider questions in relation to their own experience and ensured confidentiality.

3.5.2.2. Conducting interviews.

Prior to the interview, each participant was provided with an information sheet about the research and required to complete a consent form. Child-friendly versions were used for pupils to ensure understanding. Some time was spent building rapport with pupils by discussing topics of interest and the process of the research was explained. All pupil interviews were conducted in their current provision in a familiar quiet room and with a familiar staff member in a nearby room. Rooms for interviews were changed or

adapted dependent on individual need; one pupil requested a smaller room, one requested to use a different room and another asked for all the blinds to be shut due to sensory needs. Parent interviews were conducted in different places at their convenience and preference, including in their child's current provision (n=2), their home (n=4) over the phone (n=3) and in a public place (n=1). Teacher interviews were conducted in their workplace (n=6) or over the phone (n=2). Interviews with Educational Psychologists and Specialist Autism Teachers were conducted individually in private rooms located in three different county buildings. All interviews were audio recorded with the exception of one where the pupil opted out of being recorded.

The semi-structured interviews with parents asked questions about their child's educational experiences in previous schools and their current provision as well as their experiences of school exclusion. Interviews with teachers asked them to focus on an autistic student who was included in the study and consider their strengths, needs, main barriers to education and how these are supported in their current provision. Interviews with Educational Psychologists and Specialist Autism Teachers asked questions about their experiences supporting pupils who have been excluded, experienced a managed move or who are at risk of exclusion and the ways in which they support the inclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum in mainstream schools. The semi-structured interviews with young people explored their educational experiences in both mainstream and their current provision as well as their experience of school exclusion.

3.5.2.3. Inclusive methodological approaches.

Inclusive methodological approaches were used to ensure the voices of the pupils were heard by supporting their engagement and helping them to reflect on and communicate their perspectives (Begley, 2000; Winstone et al., 2014). The semi-structured interview

with young people was made more accessible using the Life Grid method and Drawing the Ideal School technique.

The Life Grid method helped pupils map educational experiences by writing key words next to time points on a prepopulated timeline (Jalali & Morgan, 2017). Key words, such as names of schools, feelings or events, were generated from questions asked in the interview exploring the pupils' school experiences (Figure 2). The researcher followed the pupil's lead, providing them with the opportunity to write or offering to write key words for them. This technique was used in previous research to gain the voice of pupils with SEN and those in PRUs (Jalali & Morgan, 2017; O'Connor, Hodkinson, Burton, & Torstensson, 2011).

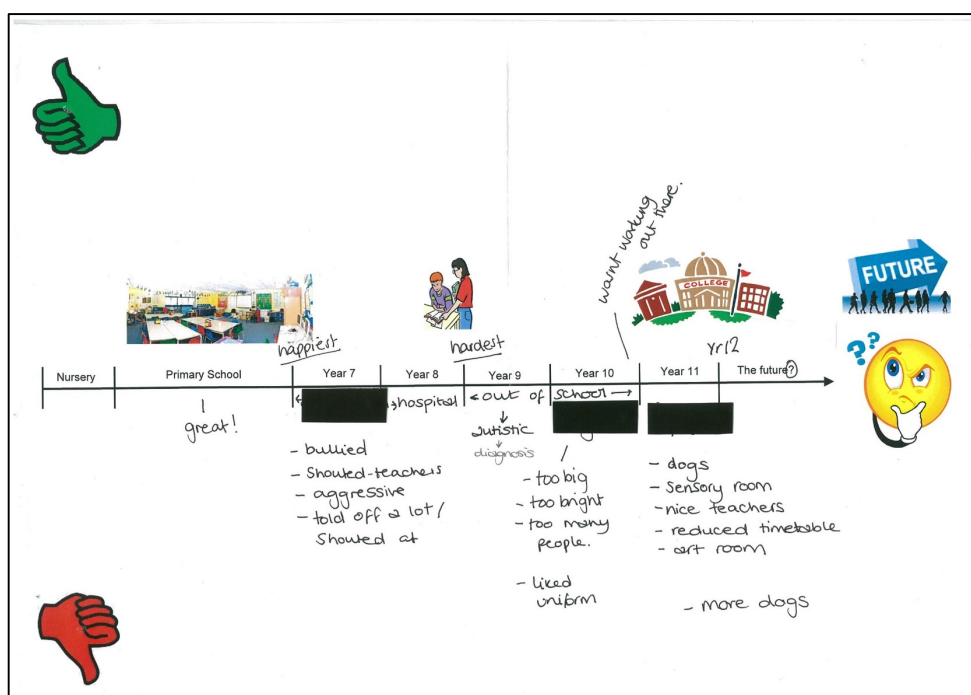


Figure 2. Example of an anonymised completed Life Grid

This method was chosen due to its strengths highlighted in previous research. First, using this method reduced the social demands of interviews by providing visual stimuli to focus on which supported any social communication difficulties. Second, the Life

Grid has been shown to be effective tool in helping accurately recall events with more in-depth responses whilst engaging in the process of constructing and reflecting on life history (Bell, 2005; Groenewald & Bhana, 2015; O'Connor et al., 2011). This was vital as young autistic people may have some memory difficulties and find it difficult to sequence past events without a framework to help them (Hare, Mellor & Azmi, 2006). Finally, the Life Grid has been found to support the discussion of sensitive issues, which was relevant to the current study (Chase, 2005). This was evident in the current study as one of the participants, when asked how he felt in a previous setting, asked “can I write it down?” being unable to verbally communicate the sensitive nature of his suicidal thoughts. The strengths of the Life Grid method helped create a relaxed atmosphere, build a relationship between the interviewer and respondents and facilitated discussions supportive of the ‘voices’ of the autistic young people.

Drawing the Ideal School technique was also used within the semi-structured interviews with pupils. Pupils first drew a school that they would *not* like to go to, naming elements of the classroom and describing the other pupils and teachers (Figure 3). They were then asked to draw a school they would like to go to, ‘an ideal school’, including the classroom, students and adults (Figure 4). The researcher used flexibility within this approach following the lead of the pupils; some pupils wanted to draw, others wanted to only write key words and some did both.

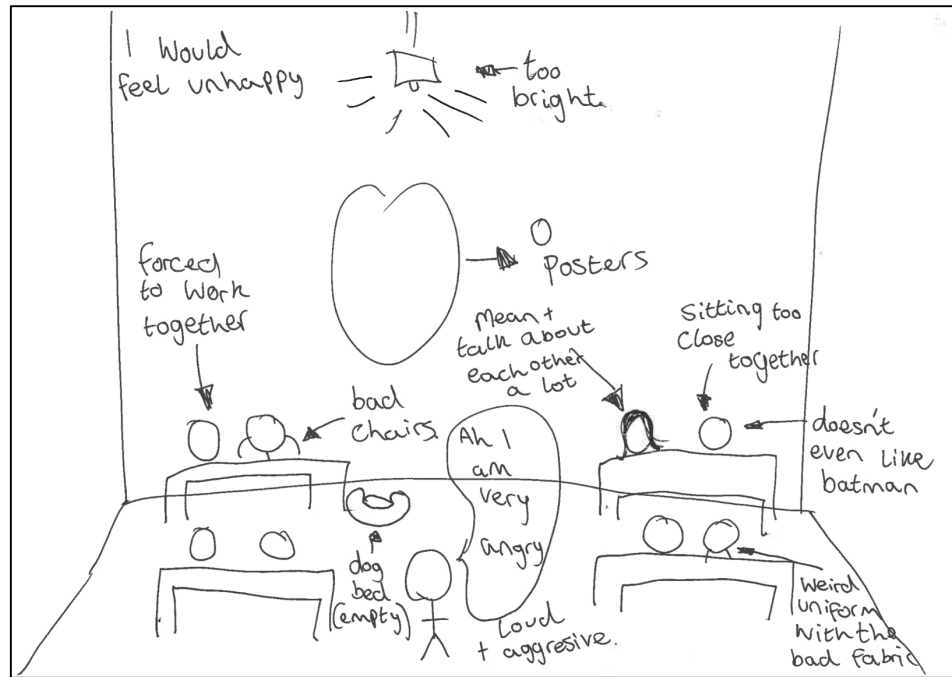


Figure 3. Non-ideal school by PU7

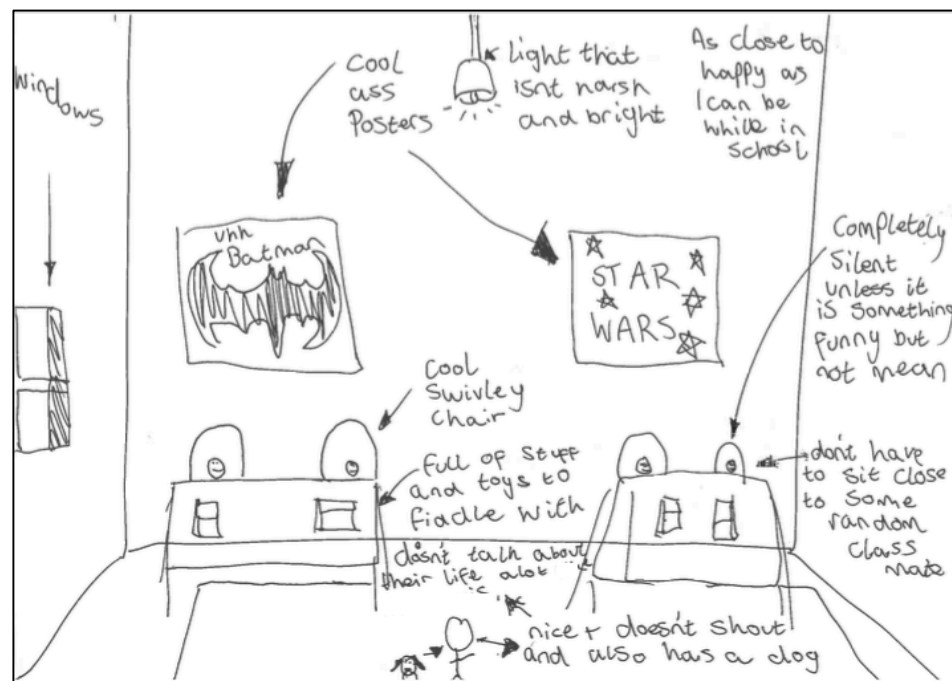


Figure 4. Ideal school by PU7

This technique is derived from Drawing the Ideal Self technique (Moran, 2001) based on Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955). PCP fits well with the social constructionist stance of this research as it proposes that our behaviour is a response to how we make sense of the world around us (Kelly, 1955). This is crucial when thinking

about the topic of exclusion, as pupil behaviour is a response to how they make sense of the provision they are placed in. The Drawing the Ideal School technique has been used successfully with young people on the autism spectrum in previous research to identify the most important features of school provision to the pupils (Williams & Hanke, 2010).

3.6. Transcribing interviews

The interviews ranged in length from 10 minutes to 30 minutes for pupils, 15 minutes to 145 minutes for parents, 20 minutes to 51 minutes for teachers, 14 minutes to 35 minutes for Educational Psychologists and 16 minutes to 49 minutes for Specialist Autism Teachers. All interviews (with one exception noted above) were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.7. Qualitative data analysis

Data from Educational Psychologists and Specialist Autism Teachers were first combined as they are both local authority professionals within the exosystem in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Data were analysed separately for each participant group (pupils, parents, teachers, local authority professionals). Key words written on the Life Grid and Drawing the Ideal School technique from Child 12, who did not want to be recorded, were included in the analysis.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis due to its flexible approach and compatibility with the social constructionist epistemological stance of this research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can help understand how participants make meaning of their experience and the social context of these meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were interpreted using an inductive (bottom up) approach, themes were

drawn from the data and no pre-existing codes applied. All data were analysed using the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher became familiarised with the data by listening to the audio recordings and transcribing the interviews, making relevant notes. Second, the researcher reviewed transcripts and used NVivo software to generate initial codes (QSR international, 2015; Appendix M). Third, the codes were reviewed several times and grouped into potential themes for each participant group (Appendix N). Participant groups were then combined to create thematic maps for each research question. Groups were combined due to the consistency of themes across groups, with differences highlighted in subthemes to offer a more coherent picture. Fourth, the themes were then refined and reviewed several times to ensure they reflected the data. Fifth, themes were defined and named and final thematic maps were created. Finally, a report was produced to outline the results of the thematic analysis and discussed in relation to the research questions (Chapter 4 & 5).

To ensure pupil voice was protected, when participant groups were combined the researcher ensured that the pupil data were used first and the other participant data were mapped onto these pupil themes, with any additional information from other participants being added as new themes or subthemes. The researcher did not use frequency tables as the social communication difficulties of the pupils meant the importance of codes could not be based on the frequency of which they were mentioned. When creating the thematic maps the researcher ensured all pupil information shared in the interviews was represented. When discussing the themes and subthemes in the findings, the researcher used quotes from pupils and any differences between pupils and other participant groups were discussed to ensure pupil voice remained prominent. Pupils' unique insights within themes were discussed in the findings in relation to the parents, teachers and local authority professionals' insights

to ensure the triangulation of data. Considering all perspectives together ensured a full understanding of the social phenomena of a school exclusion.

3.8. Inter-rater reliability

Yardley (2008) suggested that coding should be corroborated to ensure the codes and themes reflect the data. As part of step three of the thematic analysis, initial codes and themes were discussed with two research supervisors and two colleagues completing the same doctoral course. This was to ensure alternative interpretations to the data were considered and reflected on. Similarities and differences were discussed and adjustments were made to the themes and subthemes. The researcher used this process to increase reliability by reducing researcher bias and ensuring data were objectively interpreted.

3.9. Reflexivity

It is recognised that the researcher's own beliefs and values impact the data collection and interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As the researcher was a trainee Educational Psychologist within the county, specific ways in which the study was influenced by the researcher were considered, for example knowledge of the schools and systems that operate within the county (Yardley, 2008). Nevertheless, the researcher's prior knowledge of schools and county services were also helpful to ensure accurate interpretation. It is also important to acknowledge the emotional impact these accounts had on the researcher. Some of the negative experiences pupils faced were very difficult to hear, particularly those that had led to escalating mental health difficulties for pupils.

3.10. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was gained from the Research Ethics Committee at the Institute of Education, University of London (Appendix O).

3.10.1. Informed consent.

All participants in the study provided full written informed consent and were given the right to withdraw participation at any time. Pupil participants were provided with child friendly information sheets to ensure they understood the research process. Additionally, the research was explained to the young people verbally at the start of the interview by the researcher and a staff member at the school using a child friendly explanation. This ensured the pupils understood what their participation would involve. Additional verbal consent was gained at the time of interview to ensure pupils were still happy to take part. Pupils were reminded that they could opt out at any time and provided with visual 'break' and 'stop' cards, none of which were used. The researcher followed the provision's safeguarding procedures for one pupil who made a disclosure.

3.10.2. Sensitivity of topic.

The researcher attempted to reduce any level of discomfort or embarrassment experienced by participants by using a balanced interview schedule to discuss positive and negative experiences. Furthermore, the Life Grid method was used with pupil participants which has been found to support the discussion of sensitive issues (Chase, 2005). The researcher visited the provisions before the interview took place to meet some of the pupils so they felt more comfortable. All participants were reminded about confidentiality procedures to ensure they felt comfortable anonymously disclosing information. It was also important to acknowledge that as the researcher was on placement at the county, some of the parent participants felt uncomfortable disclosing negative views about the county to the researcher. The researcher ensured professional

boundaries were in place and reiterated confidentiality so participants felt comfortable disclosing information.

3.10.3. Vulnerability of young autistic people.

Inclusive methodological approaches were used to minimise the social communication difficulties which may be experienced by the autistic young people and ensure the pupils could communicate in meaningful ways (Harrington et al., 2014). A Life Grid method and Drawing the Ideal School technique was used to reduce some of the social demands placed on individuals during an interview. Questions in the interview were worded carefully to ensure there was less possibility for misinterpretation of language. The researcher closely monitored the pupils' wellbeing and ensured additional breaks were offered where deemed necessary.

3.10.4. Anonymity and data protection.

All electronic data (recordings, transcriptions) were stored on encrypted files on a password-protected computer and transferred using encrypted USB storage. All interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone with permission and were deleted once they had been uploaded to an encrypted file on a password protected computer.

3.10.5. Confidentiality.

All resulting data contained only the participant's ID number and was kept separately from the consent forms so participants were unable to be identified.

4. Findings

4.1. Chapter summary

The concurrent mixed-method multi-informant approach adopted in this research aimed to ensure a range of interacting systems were explored within the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The quantitative data gathered gained information on individual characteristics at the microsystem that result from the individuals' interactions with their immediate environment. The qualitative data gathered explored a range of systems from multiple perspectives to examine the school- and system- level factors contributing to the school exclusion of autistic pupils included in this study. Findings from the quantitative data are first presented followed by findings from the qualitative data to ensure a full understanding of the social phenomena of school exclusion is understood from multiple levels.

4.2. Quantitative findings

Given the heterogeneity that exists in autism, the first aim was to determine the behavioural and cognitive characteristics of the pupils sampled here. This was to examine whether they demonstrated a particular set of characteristics which may have contributed to their school exclusion. To this end, Table 2 shows individual scores and group-based statistics on pupils' autistic features, intellectual functioning, sensory behaviours, behavioural difficulties and perceived quality of life.

4.3. Findings for RQ1: What are the characteristics of pupils on the autism spectrum who experience school exclusion?

Eight of the nine pupils whose parents completed the SCQ obtained scores above the cut-off score of 15 (Rutter et al., 2003) suggestive of elevated autistic symptoms (see

Table 2). One pupil scored below the cut-off point (score of 12) but was still included in the sample given that he has an existing independent, clinical diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Pupils' individual scores on the WASI-II ranged from extremely low (45) to superior (142), indicative of wide variation in cognitive functioning (Table 2). The vast majority, however, scored at least within the average range, suggesting that these pupils could be considered intellectually able. One of the pupils (PU9) who scored within the extremely low range showed high levels of anxiety when completing the test, which may have affected his score. His teacher reported he was academically able but his anxiety often affected his performance.

Pupils' scores on the AASP indicated significant sensory differences in all quadrants as all mean scores fell outside the range considered typical for the general population (Table 3). According to the SDQ scores (see Table 4), the children showed significant behavioural difficulties in all areas, as well as low pro-social behaviour compared to a typical normative population. Finally, mean scores obtained from 11 participants who completed the PedsQL Inventory indicate a lower quality of life in all areas compared to a typical population (Table 5).

Table 2. Individual scores, mean scores (M), standard deviation (SD) and range for all pupil participants on key variables.

Pupil	Age (mths)	Gender	SCQ	WAS I-2 Full Scale IQ	AAS P LR	AAS P SSee	AAS P SSen	AAS P SA	SDQ Total	Peds QL
PU1	182	Male	20	91	-	-	-	-	15	76.09
PU2	199	Male	12	67	-	-	-	-	10	84.78
PU3	201	Male	25	122	42	26	42	38	21	83.70
PU4	164	Male	27	118	27	35	30	32	25	73.91
PU5	215	Male	29	142	51	38	56	63	24	61.96
PU6	183	Male	25	127	39	56	38	43	19	61.96
PU7	175	Female	-	108	52	26	52	62	-	36.96
PU8	171	Male	16	75	29	48	30	25	28	58.70
PU9	207	Male	22	45	-	-	-	-	19	-
PU10	187	Male	-	86	42	35	39	55	20	72.83
PU11	186	Female	-	84	36	43	42	41	-	58.70
PU12	196	Male	26	96	46	31	47	50	13	58.70
Mean	188.83	-	22.44	96.75	40.44	37.56	41.78	45.44	19.40	66.21
SD	15.18	-	5.55	27.84	8.76	10.01	8.90	13.11	5.56	13.83
Range	164 - 215		12-29	45- 142	27-52	26-56	30-56	25-63	10-28	36.96 - 84.78

Notes: Social Communication Questionnaire (Rutter et al., 2003) (scores of 15 and above suggest the individual is likely to have ASD; higher scores indicative of greater autistic features); SDQ: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) (higher scores reflect great behavioural difficulties, excluding prosocial where a high score reflects better pro-social behaviour); AASP: Adult/Adolescent Sensory Profile (Brown & Dunn, 2002); LR: Low Registration; SSee: Sensation Seeking; SSen: Sensory Sensitivity; SA: Sensation Avoiding (higher and lower scores reflect sensory processing differences); PedsQL: Paediatric Quality of Life Inventory (Varni et al., 1999) (higher scores reflect better quality of life); WASI-2: Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence – 2nd edition (Wechsler, 2011) (higher scores reflect higher cognitive functioning).

Table 3. Mean scores (M) and standard deviation (SD) for all pupil participants and typical adolescents from the standardisation sample on the AASP quadrants (Brown & Dunn, 2011).

AASP quadrants	Current study sample (n=9)	Typical adolescents (11-17yrs) from standardisation sample (n=193) (Brown & Dunn, 2011)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Low registration	40.44 (8.76)	33.57 (7.66)
Sensory seeking	37.56 (10.01)	49.42 (8.98)
Sensory sensitivity	41.78 (8.90)	33.98 (7.39)
Sensation avoiding	45.44 (13.11)	33.02 (7.06)

Notes: AASP: Adult/Adolescent Sensory Profile (Brown & Dunn, 2002); LR: Low Registration; SSee: Sensation Seeking; SSen: Sensory Sensitivity; SA: Sensation Avoiding (Scores indicative of unusual sensory preferences in children of 11-17years; <27 and >40 for low registration, <42 and >58 for sensory seeking, <26 and >40 for sensory sensitivity and <26 and >40 for sensory avoiding).

Table 4. Mean scores (M), standard deviation (SD) range and categories for pupil participants, and mean scores (M) and standard deviation (SD) for typical adolescents from the standardisation sample on the SDQ (Meltzer, Gatward, Goodman & Ford, 2000).

SDQ scales (parent report 4-17yr olds)	Current study sample (n=10)			Typical adolescent (11-15yrs) from standardisation sample (n=4443) (Meltzer et al., 2000)
	Mean (SD)	Range	Categories	Mean (SD)
Total score	19.40 (5.56)	10 – 28	High	8.2 (5.8)
Emotional problems scale	5.50 (2.68)	1 - 9	High	1.9 (2.0)
Conduct problems scale	2.90 (1.45)	1 - 5	Slightly raised	1.5 (1.7)
Hyperactivity scale	5.60 (2.55)	2 - 10	Slightly raised	3.2 (2.6)
Peer problems scale	5.70 (3.16)	0 - 9	Very high	1.5 (1.7)
Impact summary	5.30 (3.02)	2 – 10	Very high	0.4 (1.2)
Prosocial scale	5.50 (1.90)	3 - 8	Low	8.6 (1.6)

Notes: SDQ: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) (higher scores reflect great behavioural difficulties, excluding prosocial where a high score reflects better pro-social behaviour).

Table 5. Mean scores (M), standard deviation (SD) and range for pupil participants, and mean scores (M) and standard deviation (SD) for typical adolescents from the standardisation sample (Varni et al., 1999).

Peds QL Inventory (Self-report)	Current study sample (n=11)		Typical population from standardisation (n= 386 – 401) (Varni et al., 1999)
	Mean (SD)	Range	Mean (SD)
Total	66.21 (13.82)	36.96 – 84.78	83.00 (14.79)
Physical	72.16 (12.22)	46.88 – 93.75	84.41 (17.26)
Psychosocial	64.57 (16.07)	31.67 – 85.00	82.38 (15.51)
Emotional	66.82 (22.39)	35.00 – 100.00	80.86 (19.64)
Social	62.23 (25.82)	10.00 – 95.00	87.42 (17.18)
School functioning	65.45 (16.80)	25.00 – 85.00	78.63 (20.53)

Notes: PedsQL: Paediatric Quality of Life Inventory (Varni et al., 1999) (higher scores reflect better quality of life)

4.4. Qualitative findings

This section presents the main findings from the semi-structured interviews completed with all participant groups, which aimed to explore the school exclusion experiences of pupils on the autism spectrum. Here, thematic maps for each research question are presented and relevant themes and subthemes are discussed. Educational Psychologists and Autism Teachers are collectively referred to as ‘local authority professionals’. Code names are used to identify individual quotes from respondents, including PU for pupils, PA for parents, T for teachers, EP for Educational Psychologists and AT for Autism teachers.

4.5. Findings for RQ2: Which factors contribute to the exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum from mainstream school?

Three themes and 13 subthemes were identified from the data from parents, pupils and local authority professionals within the context of RQ2 (Figure 5).

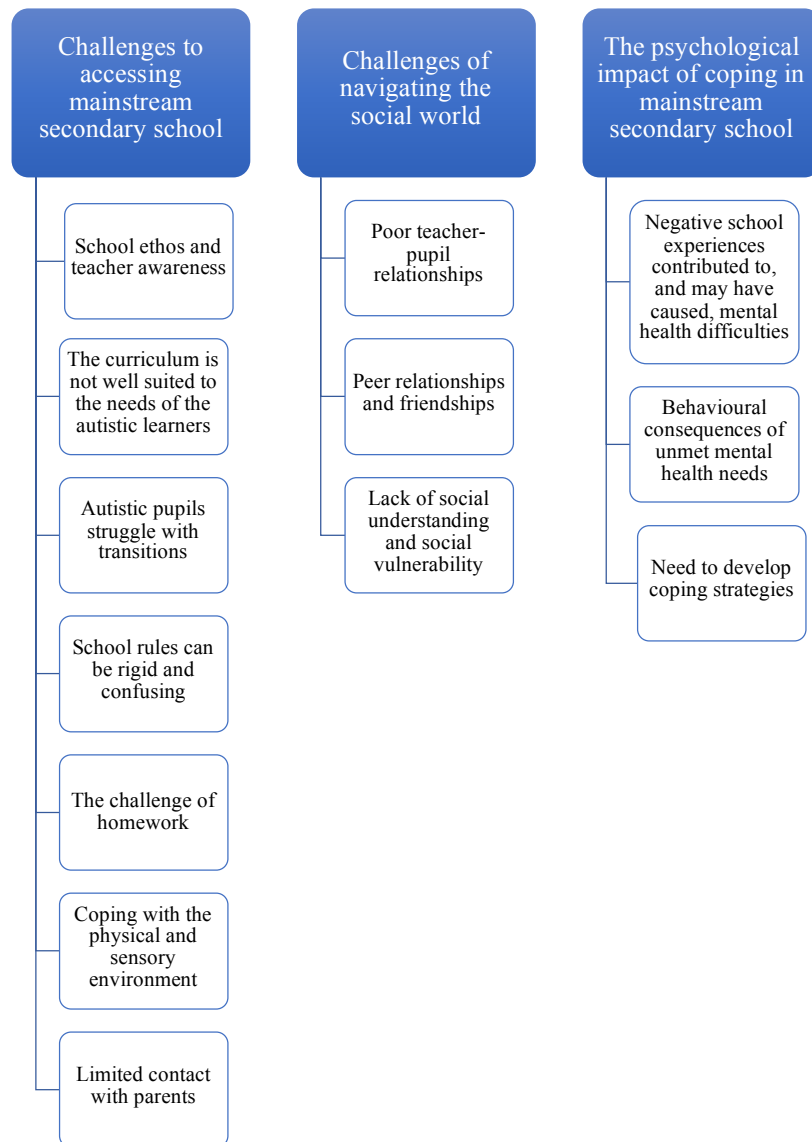


Figure 5. Thematic map for research question 2

4.5.1. Theme 1: Challenges to accessing mainstream secondary school.

This theme refers to the multiple challenges (see Figure 6) faced by autistic pupils when accessing mainstream secondary school.

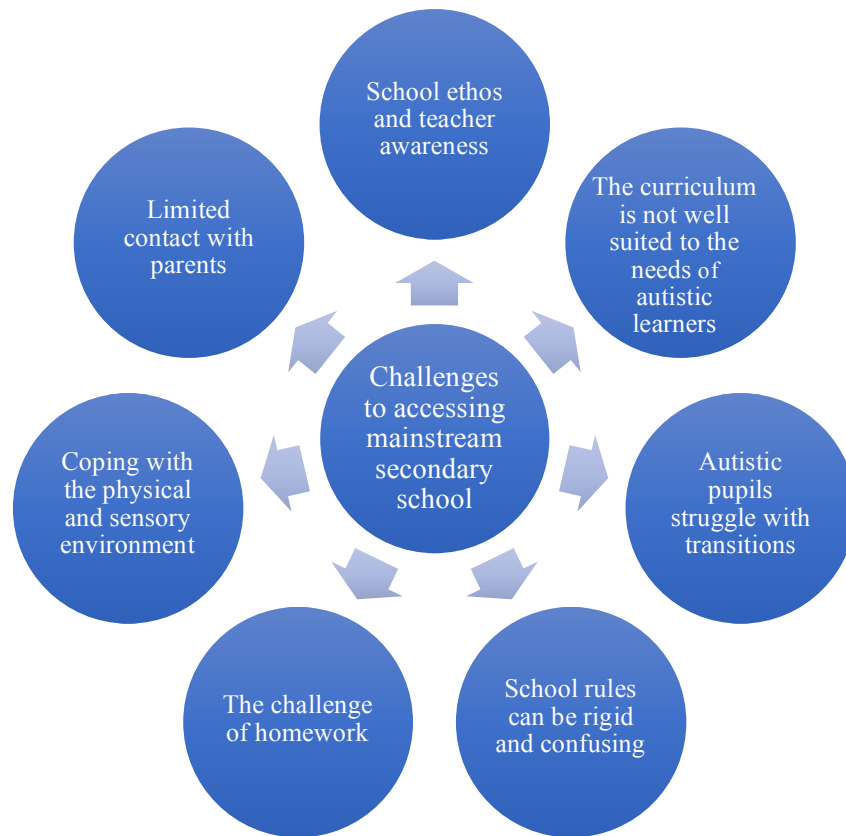


Figure 6. Theme 1 - Challenges to accessing mainstream secondary school

4.5.1.1. Subtheme: School ethos and teacher awareness.

Many parents and local authority professionals described a lack of inclusive school ethos in mainstream schools. PA7 stated, “a lot of schools will pay lip services to inclusion, what they say and what they do are very different things”. Some highlighted the importance of an inclusive school ethos being implemented top-down from a senior leadership level to ensure inclusivity.

That might have to come not just at teacher level but at head and senior leadership team level, they have to be on board with this and make their school autism friendly, make allowances for sensory needs and have a more sympathetic, if not empathetic view of the child (EP3).

All participant groups discussed the lack of teacher awareness of autism. PU8 reflected on staff knowledge at his mainstream school: “there was only one person who was actually trained in autism”. PA6 commented on the consequences of a lack of teacher awareness, “It’s soul destroying for the child too, cos he’s not being understood, and he’s shouting so loud but nobody’s hearing him, and you just need to understand his language or you need to understand him”. However, parents highlighted positive skills shown by teachers in mainstream schools when working with their children; “there were certain individual teachers and individual members or staff that were very good with him” (PA5).

4.5.1.2. Subtheme: The curriculum is not well suited to the needs of autistic learners.

Participant groups talked about the struggles of accessing the curriculum for the autistic individuals due to learning differences. PA9 commented, “A lot of autistic kids don’t have a learning difficulty; it’s just they learn differently, they just need that support”. They mentioned the need for clear directions, structure, short bursts of work and an adapted curriculum. PU5 commented on his difficulty of accessing broad tasks that are set for the whole class: “In a mainstream school broad tasks are assigned, it might not be the best for every single student but on average it’s good for everyone, but honestly, it’s just everyone learns in a different way”.

Others discussed the specific struggles those on the autism spectrum faced, for example, with organisation, executive function difficulties, difficulties surrounding rigid thinking, interpretation and the difficulty understanding the language used by teachers. Some participants discussed the struggles they faced accessing and receiving appropriate support in lessons. PU6 reflected on strategies that may have helped him, including setting “clear directions, which they seem to be horrible at doing”. Local authority professionals also mentioned some of the extra support pupils may need: “For

a lot of the students with autism it's time, that's what they need" (AT2). Parents also reflected on the "lack of support" (PU11) made available for their children in mainstream school: "[he] didn't get any extra help at all, which I find pretty sad" (PA2).

4.5.1.3. Subtheme: Autistic pupils struggle with transitions.

Local authority professionals and parents mentioned the difficulties autistic pupils experienced with transitions, including transitions into the school: "He couldn't understand how when he left primary, where he was gonna go, it was like he was lost, it wasn't connected that he was moving on to another school, so he got really anxious" (PA3). Reference was also made to the lack of support for transitions between year groups:

They don't cope with transition very well, so that change from year 7 to year 8 is actually huge, they can end up with totally new range of 16 different teachers with different expectations and so that transition is really important but I think it gets lost because the SENCO's having to deal with the new intake coming in and they can't deal with the existing ones (AT2).

4.5.1.4. Subtheme: School rules can be rigid and confusing.

Autistic pupils and local authority professionals commented on the difficulties autistic pupils face following the school rules within mainstream. AT1 talked about the expectations of the pupils to follow rules and the school's inability to be flexible and make adjustments leading to school exclusion, "...refusal to comply with the school rules. I think primary school are a bit better at making adjustments, whereas I think when you get to secondary school they're expected a bit more to toe the line" (AT1).

Pupils also commented on their difficulties understanding the purpose of school rules, particularly if these were driven by social rules:

They implement like a system and if you were good you rose up a rank, and then if you get even more you move, you rose up to maximum rank, and at the end, what the goal was to, if you got to the maximum rank you got to put a medal on to a thing, sort of like a pot thing, then once the pot reached about 30 or 20 medals we would do something special, which I find to be annoying, cos if somebody worked to get 20, 30 medals for all of us, oh I know that's pretty hard, but if somebody had to do that, and all the other children all got down the list to the maximum below, they would get a reward too even though the one person did all the work (PU4).

4.5.1.5. Subtheme: The challenge of homework.

Many of the respondents discussed the apparently enormous difficulties pupils had completing homework and the effect that this had on their mental health and school attendance. The pupils often observed a strict “separation between home and school” and struggled to complete learning in a home environment. PU5 and PA4 explained this:

But eventually there would be some days where that just wasn't an option it was like, you've got to hand it in, it's in the first lesson or something, and on those days I would tend to just not go in, just be sick, or actually it wasn't as if I would pretend to be sick but it was like a cause for my anxiety and stress, and things like that don't really manifest typically, for me it's just, I end up feeling

extremely sick, and end up throwing up, and that's what generally would happen every single time (PU5).

But it was year 8 when he started to get really ill and frightened of homework, and you know at one stage we didn't realise that the trigger for all the absences from school was he was told that he would have to work, I think it was three hours a night at home for his GCSEs, and he couldn't bare the thought of that because home is safe and where he doesn't work and school was school and he just flipped basically over that (PA4).

4.5.1.6. Subtheme: Coping with the physical and sensory environment.

Pupils, parents and local authority professionals all emphasised the impact of coping with the physical and sensory environment. Pupils named many of the physical aspects they found difficult about mainstream school, which was particularly evident during their task of Drawing the Ideal School. Pupils were very specific about the position of desks, the spacing between furniture, the size of rooms, lighting and wall art. They discussed the impact of environmental factors, such as light and noise, which they often found challenging: "I didn't like that school a lot, it had a lot of stuff going on, and the classrooms were too big and the lights were too bright" (PU7). PU5 also commented on his struggles: "One of the big things is being able to filter out background noise and deal with distractions because it's just not possible in a mainstream school to try and do that". PU10 mentioned the busy environment of the school: "It wasn't really that good, it was very big and everyone was doing everything".

Local authority professionals and parents also acknowledged the overstimulation and environmental distractors experienced by pupils. EP3 emphasised

the impact of sensory environment: “A lot of the environmental distractors, like just general noise levels, different sensory needs and people not realising that they might need a lot more breaks, brain breaks or movement breaks than other children to sort of have some sensory regulation”. Parents also commented on difficulties with the sensory environment, PA3 reflected on her son’s main difficulties in mainstream school:

I think the environment, definitely the environment because that’s what he needed because he’s got the sensory issues and loud noises, and when he was in the classroom he couldn’t cope, he’d always been holding his ears or shouting over everyone because he couldn’t cope with that.

4.5.1.7. Subtheme: Limited contact with parents.

Parents felt there was a “lack of communication with staff” (PA9) from mainstream schools and that schools put up barriers to communication. PA1 said, “I was refused twice to see the SENCO” and other parents described the inflexibility surrounding meetings, being let down and losing trust in schools. Many felt schools did not collaboratively work with parents or take on information and advice about their children, and often made contact regarding negative behaviour only.

4.5.2. Theme 2: Challenges of navigating the social world.

This theme explored difficulties autistic pupils faced navigating the social world within mainstream school (Figure 7).

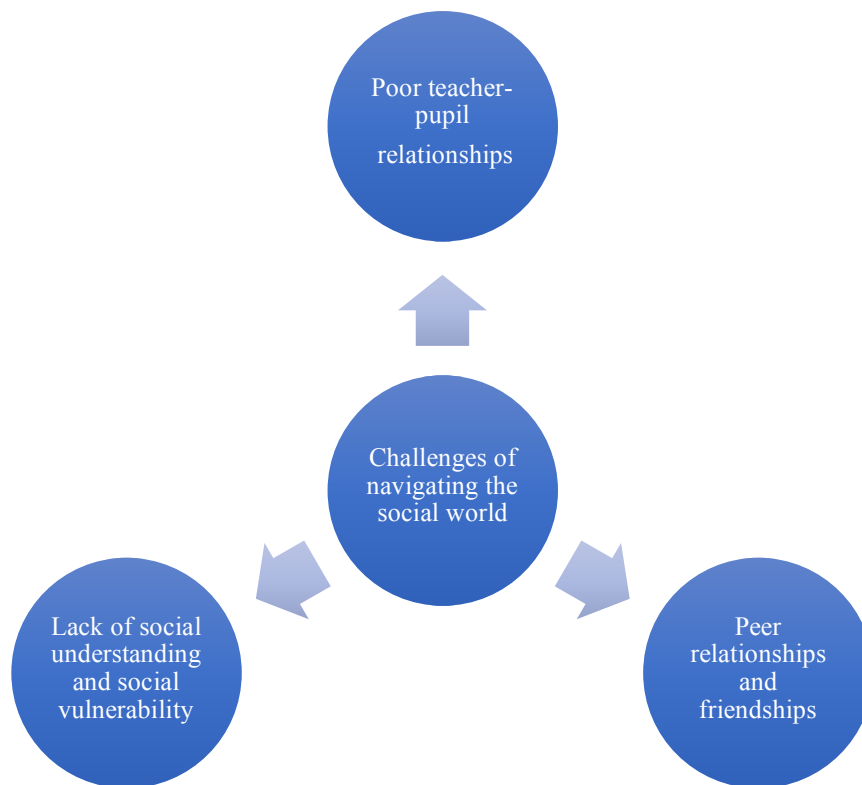


Figure 7. Theme 2 - Challenges of navigating the social world

4.5.2.1. Subtheme: Poor teacher-pupil relationships.

All respondent groups commented on the difficult teacher-pupil relationships autistic pupils experienced, including the characteristics of teachers, the perceived lack of respect from teachers and the language they used. Pupils described the teachers as “aggressive”, “angry”, “loud” and “disrespectful”, and parents described some teachers as “disrespectful”, “angry” and “intolerant”. PU7 reflected on the teachers in her mainstream school, “I didn’t like the teachers there, the teachers shouted a lot and they were like really aggressive” and PU9 stated, “The way it seemed is that they wanted respect but they didn’t treat us with respect”. Parents felt their children were victimised or openly disliked by some teachers: “the Deputy Head who just loathed [son], he just couldn’t even conceal his loathing for him” (PA7). Local authority professionals also noted these difficult relationships: “A lot of these ones that I am seeing now who are

school refusing, it's normally around how the teachers have spoken to them in classes" (EP3).

Parents, however, also spoke of the effectiveness of those teachers who took the time to get to know their children and its impact on their learning: "The ones who get to know him and get him, he responds really well, you'll get his attention, he'll interact, he'll be part of it, he'll contribute to the lessons. The moment he feels a teacher is being negative towards him he gives up and he can be really challenging" (PA1).

4.5.2.2. Subtheme: Peer relationships and friendships.

Peer relationships and friendships was a common subtheme across the participant groups. Many discussed the difficulties autistic pupils faced with their peer interactions: "It gets more difficult for them at secondary school because the social interaction side of things gets more difficult for them" (AT2). PA5 explained that he "struggles in a social atmosphere especially with his peers". Parents also commented on their children's struggles to engage with peers: "We would watch him how he was you know with his friends around, there was never really a clear conversation" (PA2). Feelings of social exclusion were also described:

Because half the time I didn't really get along with girls my own age because they're very in to make up and stuff and I'm not very in to all of this girl stuff so I don't really know what they're talking about all of the time so I tend to get excluded from a lot of conversations (PU7).

Local authority professionals commented on social exclusion as a reason for school refusal: "I have got a few children...who are school refusing because of social isolation issues within the school" (EP3). However, while some of the pupils struggled to form

friendships: “he didn’t have particularly a good circle of friends or a close circle of friends at his own school” (PA5), others commented on the friendships they had formed in their previous mainstream schools: “My friends were there” (PU10); “then he really got his friendship circle from [mainstream] and they’ve remained” (PA1). Pupils spoke about their desire for positive peer groups, PU4 noted that in his ideal school, “I’d sort of feel like I meant something to my friends” and others talked about the friends they missed from their mainstream school.

4.5.2.3. Subtheme: Lack of social understanding and social vulnerability.

Respondents also emphasised pupils’ lack of social understanding and social vulnerability. PU7 spoke about her difficulties understanding others, “I didn’t like most of the people because I didn’t know what they were going on about most of the time” and EP4 commented about one pupil’s social struggles, “[he] really struggles to see another person’s point of view”. Parents also described their children’s social vulnerability and being easily influenced by other pupils: “He would sit there and he wouldn’t say ‘oh no it was you’, he took the blame for a lot of things which is sad in a way” (PA2). Experiences of bullying were also highlighted by respondents: “I got bullied there very badly” (PU7); “A lot of bullying stuff, some of the stories were awful” (AT2).

4.5.3. Theme 3: The psychological impact of coping in mainstream secondary school.

Many participants commented on the mental health difficulties they experienced when in mainstream school (Figure 8).

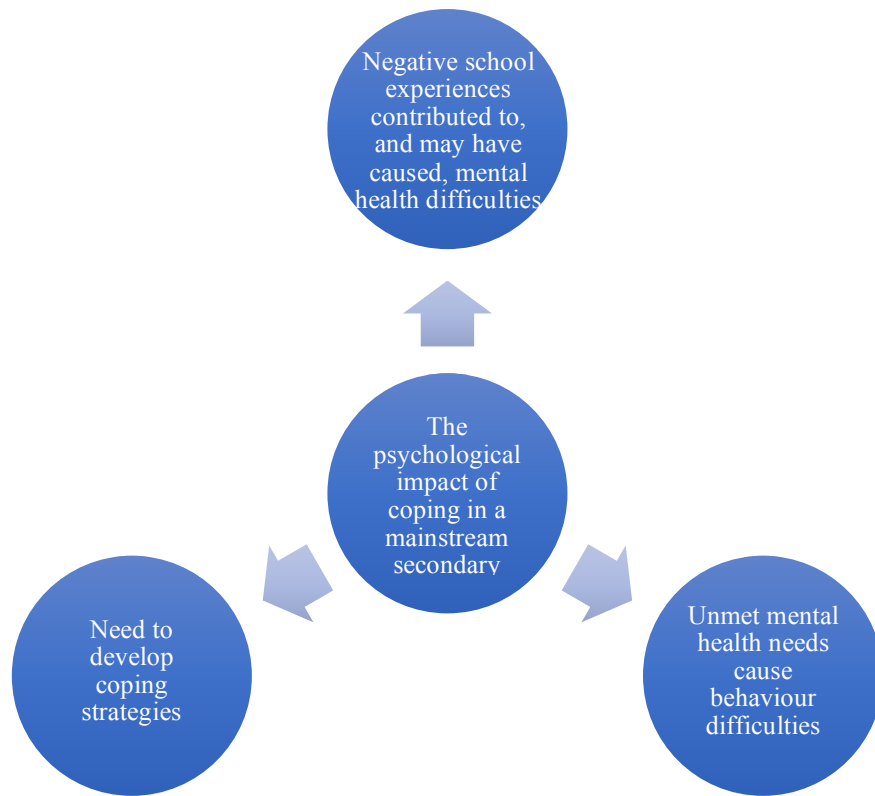


Figure 8. Theme 3 - The psychological impact of coping in mainstream secondary school

4.5.3.1. Subtheme: Negative school experiences contributed to, and may have caused, mental health difficulties.

The experience of mental health difficulties in mainstream school was a common theme emphasised by all groups. Respondents discussed anxiety, depression, distress, overwhelming feelings, stress, suicidal thoughts and the use of medication and hospitalisation, including being sectioned. Pupils highlighted negative educational experiences as the cause of their mental health needs: “I have emotional trauma connected to school” (PU7). PU8, when asked how he would feel in his non-ideal school, linked this back to his previous experiences in mainstream and stated “I think quite like on the verge of suicide, because I feel like that’s not where I am supposed to be, because I’ve tried to kill myself four times”.

Parents felt that their children's mental health needs were a direct result of their negative educational experiences: "He became anxious, stressed, depressed, suicidal" (PA7). They commented on the physical manifestations of these mental health difficulties, including shaking, sickness, refusal to eat and stool withholding. PA4 explained:

We didn't realise he was in such a state of anxiety, chronic anxiety, that eventually he just shut down, he stopped eating and drinking over a period of two years and eventually I had to take him to casualty because I was so worried about him, and he was admitted as a potential suicide risk.

Local authority professionals highlighted the impact of negative educational experiences and its contribution to the pupil's mental health needs: "I understand that particular secondary schools can be very anxiety provoking" (EP4).

4.5.3.2. Subtheme: Unmet mental health needs cause behaviour difficulties.

All participant groups described the impact of these unmet mental health needs on the young peoples' externalised behaviour; including disruptive behaviour, negative interactions with others, aggressive behaviour and self-injurious behaviour. All participant groups directly linked this behaviour to the mental health needs of the young person. Local authority professionals highlighted this connection: "Understanding that there is a reason for their behaviour and that if they're behaving in a certain way it's not necessarily that they can help it, it's that their anxiety is getting in the way" (EP5). EP1 supported this perspective, "I think it's the emotional regulation that's the biggest barrier, the emotional regulation difficulties, the behaviours that challenge and behaviours that cause concern because of being dysregulated really". Parents also

highlighted the consequence of unmet needs, PA3 explained, “He attacked them two children. He got really stressed out and the teacher see him getting really stressed out, she didn’t take him to do anything about it, and then he attacked the two children and then he got excluded”.

4.5.3.3. Subtheme: Need to develop coping strategies.

Pupils and parents also discussed the need for pupils to develop coping strategies to manage their mental health needs. PA4 discussed her son’s difficulty expressing these emotions, “he clearly was utterly terrified and very, very anxious but he didn’t know how to articulate his own feelings”. PU5 illustrated the need for more effective coping strategies:

I guess I was more sort of, in denial about emotions and things like that at the time, in that my coping strategy for most of them was just a flat out ignore it so that it doesn’t become a cycle kind of thing, because otherwise it would have just been unbearable otherwise.

4.6. Findings for RQ3: What happens during the process of exclusion for pupils on the autism spectrum?

Four themes and 15 subthemes were identified from the data from parents, pupils and local authority professionals within the context of RQ3 (Figure 9).

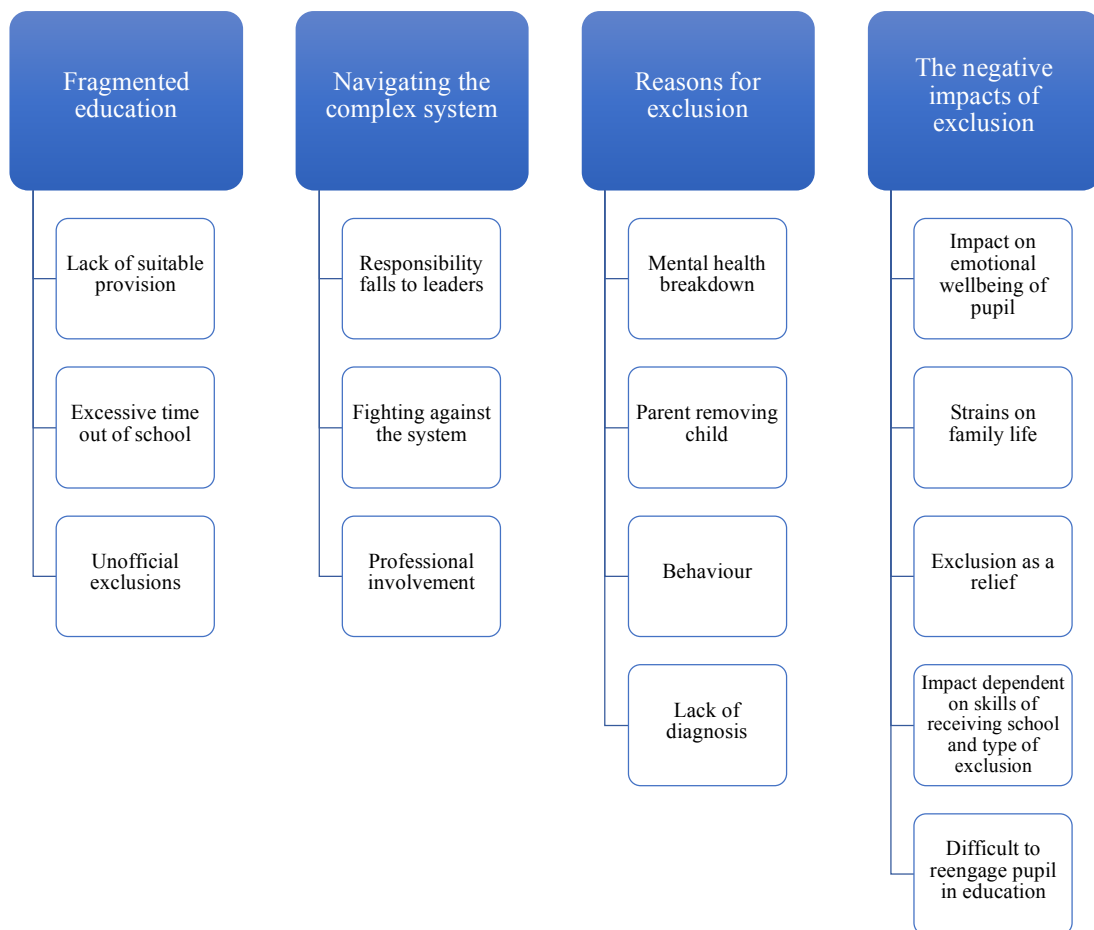


Figure 9. Thematic map for research question 3

4.6.1. Theme 1: Fragmented education.

All participants talked about the fragmented education the young autistic people experienced, including excessive time spent out of school, unofficial exclusions and a lack of suitable provision (Figure 10).

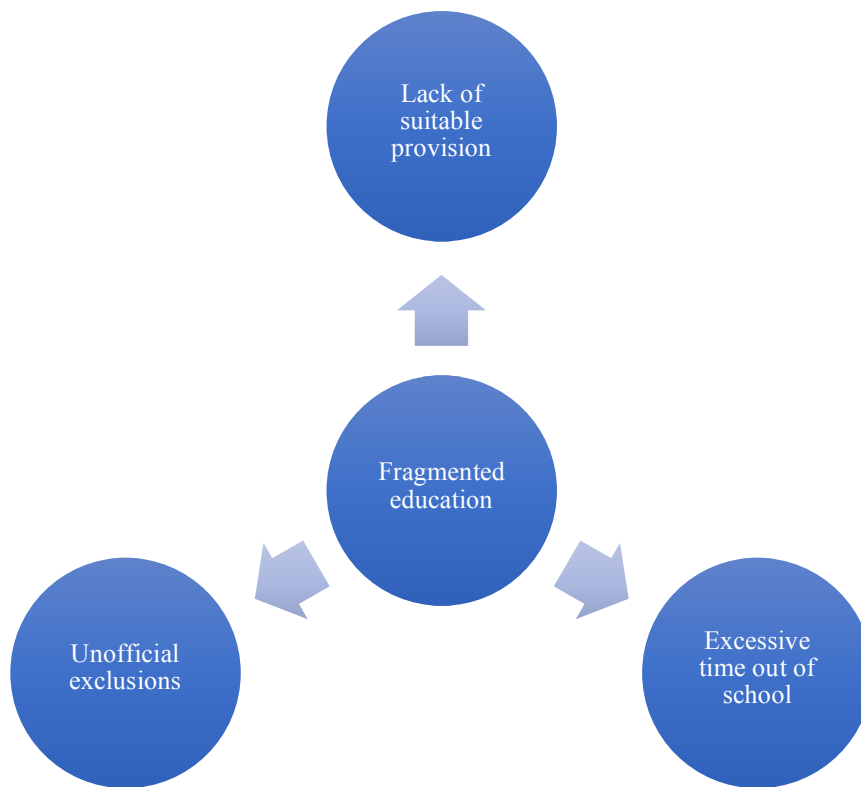


Figure 10. Theme 1 - Fragmented education

4.6.1.1. Subtheme: Lack of suitable provision.

All participant groups mentioned the lack of suitable provision for autistic pupils without additional intellectual difficulties: “I mean the main thing that comes up time and time again from schools is why does [county] not have special provision for young people with autism who don’t have learning difficulties” (EP4). Parents reported their frustration when searching for a new provision: “They were sending me to all different places and none of them really fitted his needs, and he couldn’t just go to a special needs school because he’s so academically very high so that wasn’t an option” (PA3). Parents from one of the provisions described the provision as a secret: “I didn’t even know [AP] existed at all...it was a very well-kept secret” (PA10).

4.6.1.2. Subtheme: Excessive time out of school.

Many respondents commented on the excessive amount of time pupils in the study spent out of school. For PU12, “Year 9 was at home” and PA8 stated her son “missed a good two years of education”. Some pupils discussed being in school part time: “for about one month I was in school but I was only in for about two hours” (PU4). Local authority professionals commented other pupils who are still out of school after exclusion: “one of the children is now not doing anything at all, he’s at home, his parents have given up, he’s 13, hasn’t been in school in two years, isn’t learning anything” (AT1). Parents were worried about the implications this time out of school had on their children: “He had been out for a lot of year 9, he had lots of gaps in his knowledge” (PA5).

4.6.1.3. Subtheme: Unofficial exclusions.

Parents and local authority professionals mentioned the illegal unofficial exclusions experienced by autistic pupils, including being asked to leave school in the middle of the day, as PA9 explained:

They told me, I need to take him home and I said can I have that in writing that you want me to take him home cos I wasn’t prepared to, cos I got tired of them keep saying to me, he’d be better off at home today or something. I got wise eventually and I started saying, well, no I’ve just fought to get him here, if it takes me two hours, three hours, I’m prepared to give up that time so you lot can, you know, help, but there were times that I was on the school grounds on my own with [son] trying to get him to go in.

Parents reported fighting against these unofficial exclusions; making complaints to headteachers and Governors and seeking support from professionals. Some pupils were taken back into school after being out of school due to exclusions. Some parents also experienced exclusion from events and exclusion at the point of entry into a school as PA7 described:

But I went to see the SENCo, instantly she said to me 'look I'm gonna sort of be straight with you, we've got far too many kids at this school with special educational needs and we don't want anymore, and if I were you I would look at this school, this school, this school'. And by the way the other schools in [county] aren't taking their fair share of special educational needs children so push off essentially.

Local authority professionals commented on some parents feeling they had to leave schools due to the way they were being treated; with examples of schools putting barriers up to stop inclusion, including encouraging parents to look at other schools:

But I do know the school has very rigid views and I don't think he'll be welcome and I think they will put barriers possibly in the way of him coming back and will be encouraging him to go to another school (AT2).

4.6.2. Theme 2: Navigating the complex system.

Parents and local authority workers both commented on the process of attempting to navigate and fight against the complex system surrounding exclusions (Figure 11).

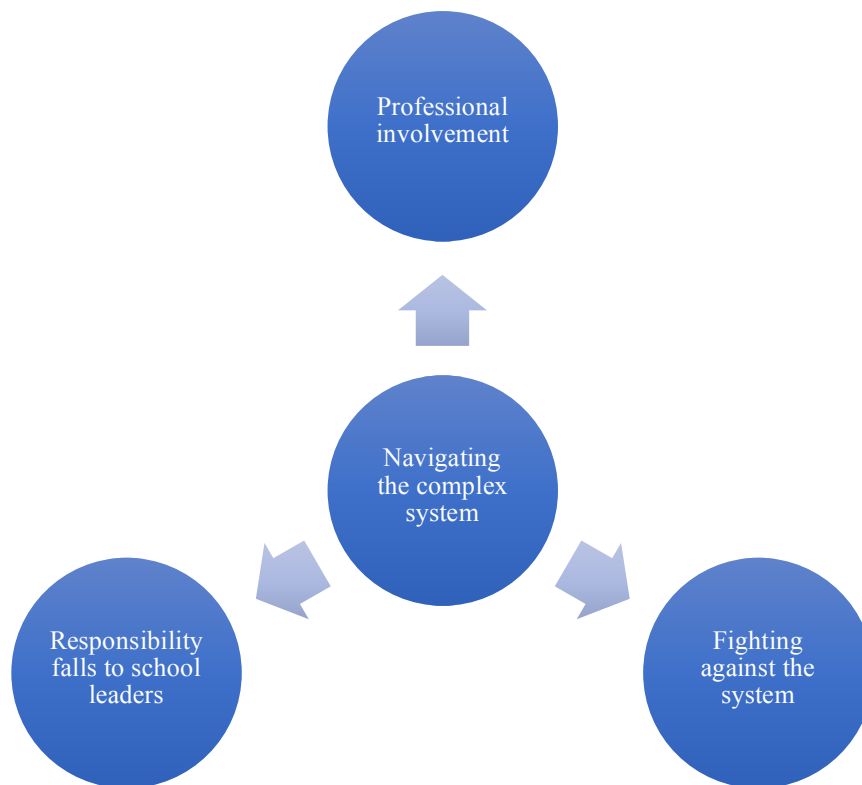


Figure 11. Theme 2 - Navigating a complex system

4.6.2.1. Subtheme: Responsibility falls to school leaders.

Parents felt they experienced a shift in responsibility when their child was excluded or became at risk of exclusion. They commented on this shift and were disappointed that staff members who had been supporting their child were no longer involved, with all responsibility moving to school leaders. Parents described the loss of important teachers: “And I can imagine that that lady (SENCo) was told to stay out of, once things got to (Deputy Head) level that lady was pushed aside...we never ever seen her again” (PA2).

4.6.2.2. Subtheme: Fighting against the system.

Many parents felt they were constantly battling with the system and had been “let down by the system so much already” (PA6). They also anticipated further battles against the system to ensure their children receive the therapeutic input specified in their EHC

plans, but also felt that “that’s just another battle to fight” (PA7). Parents also perceived the battle to be rooted in the financial costs of providing the appropriate support and felt some services were unwilling to help due to such costs. PA6 felt the system was designed to obstruct due to funding:

They're obstructing you know, cos they don't want to give the funding, they don't want to because there's so many children applying for this, there's so many children falling through the gaps, they don't have the money, they don't have the ability to be able to help, you know so they obstruct and they say no straight off.

Parents and local authority professionals described the legal processes involved, including seeking Education Health and Care Plans for specialist or AP, involvement from attendance officers and tribunals: “We had a huge challenge to try and get that EHC plan because without it we wouldn’t have got him an education” (PA4). Some parents felt the pressure to secure evidence:

I'm sending my child into this environment every day and the only reason I kept doing it was because the advice that I got was the worse it gets for him, this is all evidence, everything they do which is illegal, inappropriate, just so child-unfriendly, everything they do will be evidence that will increase your chances or securing a statement of special educational needs (PA7).

Parents also described the challenge they faced from attendance officers while their child was out of school: “You have to you know deal with this attendance officer

constantly harassing you, which was just another layer of just stress and unpleasant letters from the school” (PA7). Two of the parents also discussed their decisions to take legal advice and follow legal proceedings: “I actually took the local authority to court for failure to provide an education” (PA6) and one of these parents also went through disability discrimination proceedings and won.

4.6.2.3. Subtheme: Professional involvement.

Local authority professionals and parents commented on the professional involvement (or lack thereof) during the process of an exclusion:

We had 9 people sitting around a table passing [son] round basically, well I can't deal with that, that's not my problem, I mean maybe if you didn't have to get so many people involved with the problem it might be easier to fix (PA6).

Other parents commented on individual professionals that they found supportive during the process: “individual people who’ve been amazing like the original case officer [name] who’s the [autism teacher] who goes above and beyond” (PA7). However, most local authority professionals stated they were often not able to follow cases through: “you know we might not see them in their new setting, you know in a number of cases” (EP6). Participants repeatedly reported a lack of consistent professional involvement during the process of exclusion, except for those professionals who stepped outside the remit of their role to support as AT3 explained:

I went to see him at home when he was permanently excluded with his parents because actually I felt he needs to have somebody who he knows is rooting for him and who is trying to support him through this situation. And we know

through our students that building the trust and relationships is really difficult so if they've got somebody as, almost like a transition object, you know you become that transition object, but you're then the familiar person. I'm aware that if I was to be saying this in front of some of the powers that be they'd be saying oh well you shouldn't be doing that, but actually, I see that our role is to make sure children have their needs met and if you can be the consistent person, even though you might only be able to see that pupil a couple of times over a couple of months, actually again our pupils don't forget.

4.6.3. Theme 3: Reasons for exclusion.

All respondents discussed the wide range of reasons for exclusions of autistic children and young people from mainstream schools (Figure 12).

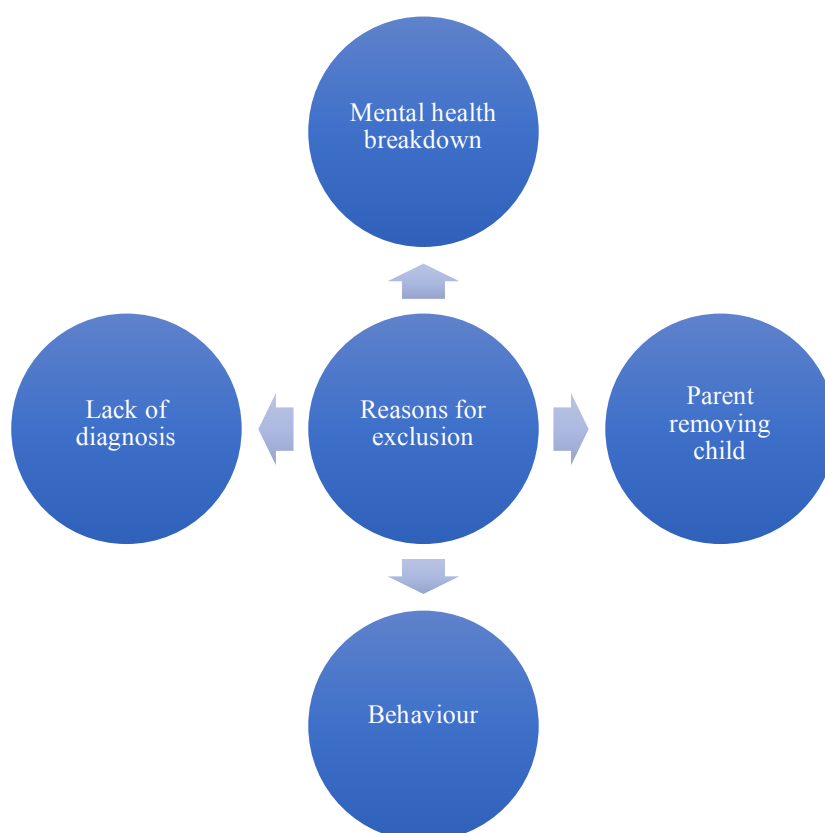


Figure 12. Theme 3 - Reasons for exclusion

4.6.3.1. Subtheme: Mental health breakdown.

Mental health issues were mentioned frequently by participants as a reason for exclusion. Pupils highlighted the mental health issues they experienced and the impact this had on their ability to be in school: “I think that was because I started to get bad because I have mental health issues, and I think I started to get bad again then so I left school again for like another year” (PU7). One EP explained that “often it’s the breakdown in mental health and wellbeing, and then the child is no longer at school rather than it’s an exclusion as such” (EP1). Another felt that “it’s the ones who are more internalising, have anxiety and really struggle, that then struggle to go back to school” (EP3). Some of these pupils were also signed off school, PA9 described this experience with her son, “He was signed off through anxiety, CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service] had signed him off”. The physical manifestations of mental health difficulties were also mentioned as barriers to attendance: “He chose not to attend because he was vomiting all the time” (PA4).

4.6.3.2. Subtheme: Parent removing child.

Parents removing their children from school was mentioned by all groups: “My mum took me out” (PU8). Parents described their reasons for doing so as not wanting to send their child into a negative experience: “I just said to my husband this child cannot be in this school, there’s no way, there is no way he’s going” (PA7). Local authority professionals supported this perspective: “I think it’s the parents making that decision but having said that, who would put your child [there], if your child was so anxious and being so traumatised by going to school” (EP1).

Other parents said they moved their children before they were moved. Local authority professionals also mentioned removal due to relationship breakdown: “The relationship had broken down significantly between the parent and the school and

actually he's had several fixed term exclusions and the parent chose to withdraw him from the setting" (AT3).

4.6.3.3. Subtheme: Behaviour.

Behaviour was also mentioned by all participant groups as a key reason for the exclusion of autistic pupils. Local authority professionals reported that those children with greater externalising behaviours were the ones that were permanently excluded: "It's the ones that have the angry outbursts that tend to get permanently excluded or managed moved" (EP3); "It's often about hitting, hurting, or trashing a room, or either verbally or physically aggressive type behaviour" (EP6).

Parents also described aggressive behaviour, disruptive behaviour and non-engagement as reasons for exclusion. PA5 also felt that "it might have been behaviour towards teachers, being unteachable". PU1 described his perspective on what happened:

Then he [headteacher] kicked me out cos I folded up the homework and from about six months ago and hid it behind the radiators because I didn't wanna do it because it was six months old and then, I dunno, I just hated it.

4.6.3.4. Subtheme: Lack of diagnosis.

Lack of diagnosis was also mentioned by all groups as a reason for exclusion as many felt an earlier diagnosis may have prevented exclusion:

Just really, really, hyper, of course I didn't know it then but I had ADHD and they didn't really have any, none of the teachers, they couldn't get me meetings

and stuff, they couldn't get me the diagnosis in time, if I had the diagnosis I assume I'd still be there (PU1).

Local authority professionals agreed that diagnoses came too late, often at the point of exclusion: “Actually some of the diagnoses of autism have come in after they’ve been excluded or at the point of exclusion” (EP3). One parent expressed her frustration “I think it’s absolutely disgusting because they permanently excluded him whilst I was waiting for the final assessment” (PA5).

4.6.4. Theme 4: The negative impact of exclusion.

All respondents noted the impact of the exclusion on the pupils on the autism spectrum, and their families (Figure 13).

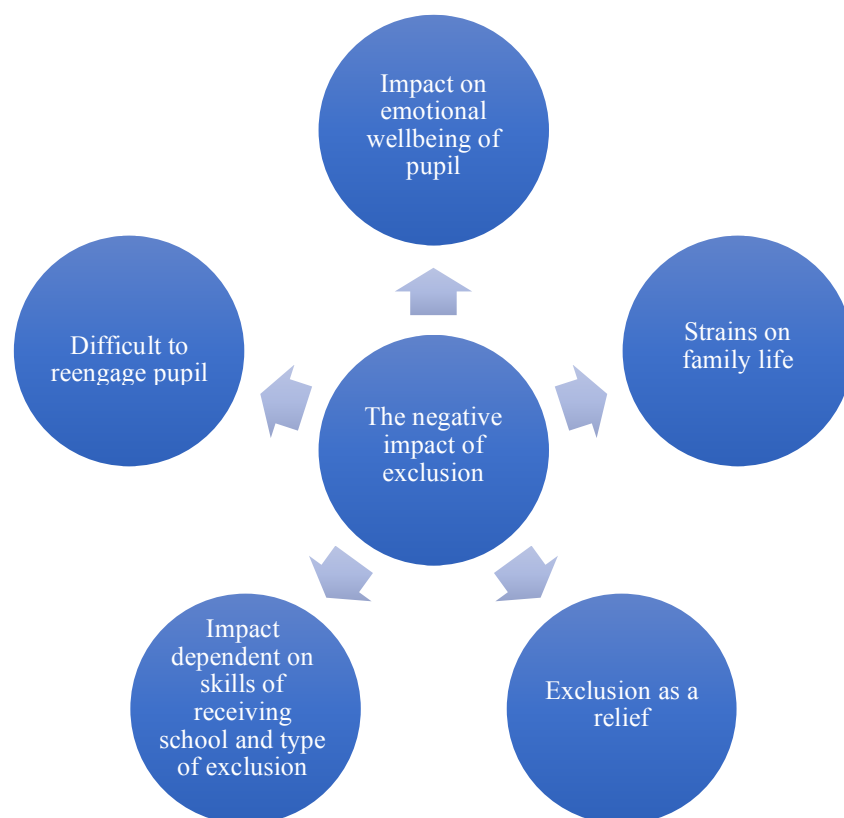


Figure 13. Theme 4 - The negative impact of exclusion

4.6.4.1. Subtheme: Impact on the emotional wellbeing of pupils.

All respondent groups mentioned the impact of the exclusion on emotional wellbeing. Pupil's experienced trouble sleeping, stress, anxiety, distress, upset, worry, fear, anger and some had been referred to CAMHS. PU4 described how he felt, "Meanwhile I was in the middle of it all just trying to cope with it. Firstly, I felt sort of sad cos I won't be able to see my friends. It sort of made me feel, like, weak". Local authority professionals also discussed the long-term impacts on mental health, they described how some pupils lost their sense of belonging, had decreased self-esteem and lowered self-confidence, felt a sense of failure, felt rejected, useless and overwhelmed and were traumatised by the exclusion. EP4 described consequences of an exclusion for one young person, which "had huge ramifications for his mental health so he sees a CAMHS worker, I mean they're describing it as a trauma because he just can't get his head around it and worried it will happen again". Parents described their child's behaviour during the process of an exclusion, "He was just so upset because obviously when you tell a child with autism you're not coming back somewhere, you know he was like beyond himself. Well he was angry all the time, he was hitting everyone, he wasn't sleeping, he was in a terrible place" (PA3). EPs described some pupils' difficulties with understanding the exclusion; some felt they wanted to go back, some felt unjustly treated as they felt their behaviour was justified and others found it very difficult to move on from the exclusion.

4.6.4.2. Subtheme: Strains on family life.

The impact of the exclusion on family life was described by many respondents. One local authority professional described the pressures on families going through exclusions, EP4 explains:

I also think the impact on the families are huge because you've suddenly got these parents that can't go out to work, they've got to support you know, they have to love and live with a young person with autism which is extraordinarily challenging, but then to have that all day every day because they can't go to a setting, is just immense, so the family stress that results in that I think also contributes to the mental health of these young people.

Parents noted that they “have another child who is hugely impacted by all of this” (PA7) and described the amount of time they spent supporting their child who had been excluded. “Fortunately I don’t also have to hold down a full-time job to pay the bills, but this situation is absolutely intolerable for families and what I’ve realised is I’m far from the only one” (PA7). This was supported by PA6 stating her son was “the epicentre if you like, nobody else got a look in”.

Other parents seemed to feel some sense of responsibility for their child’s negative experiences, PA10 stated, “Yeah well we didn’t know, so he was very stressed, very unable to cope, so he used to travel on the bus, you see I feel really bad saying all this now, it’s almost as though I should have known better”. One parent described how she felt about having a child who demonstrated such difficulties, “You know and that’s very hard to deal with, to think that your child is one of that percentage of kids who is so bad, their behaviours, their issues are so difficult that they are in this” (PA7).

4.6.4.3. Subtheme: Exclusion as a relief.

While many respondents recognised the impact of exclusion on the young person and their family, other respondents described the point of exclusion as a relief. PU3 described his exclusion as “good” and PA3 stated, “Do you know it was nearly a relief, it was pretty much every day or every other day I was getting phone calls saying what

are we going to do, so yeah it was a relief actually, it was over”. Respondents perceived the exclusion as an end to the child’s negative educational experiences. Local authority professionals also recognised the relief felt by pupils:

For some it’s probably a relief, a huge relief to be out of that school context, and out of the demands of that, you know I have seen children be changed dramatically in terms that they haven’t got those demands placed on them (EP1).

4.6.4.4. Subtheme: Impact dependent on skills of receiving school and type of exclusion.

Respondents highlighted that the impact of the exclusion was dependent on “the expertise and the understanding of the receiving school” (EP1). One pupil mentioned his exclusion being affected by where he was placed. When asked about his exclusion PU1 said the exclusion was “alright, until [I] went to [school name] and realised how bad it was”. Additionally, PA5 stated that she felt her son’s exclusion has not had a negative impact “because of the school that he’s been moved into”. EP5 also suggested that if pupils are moved into the correct provision exclusion may not be a negative experience:

I think if they’ve maybe been excluded once and they’ve been moved into the right setting and that things really improve, and then they then compare their new school to their old school and say you know that this is much better place and I’m much happier, then maybe they just put it down to the first school not having been the right place for them, so it, thinking on it, it could be that it isn’t necessarily a negative thing.

Local authority professionals also discussed managed moves as a positive alternative: “The managed moves, I think if they can work, you know it’s worth a try and you know again it’s that liaison between all the staff isn’t it and looking at it” (AT2). However, parents discussed their experiences of managed moves in a more negative light. They described being unsure of what was going on and negative feelings, some still felt it was similar to an exclusion: “even know they call it a managed move they are washing their hands with you, well they do to a certain degree anyway” (PA2).

4.6.4.5. Subtheme: Difficult to reengage pupil in education.

All respondent groups described the difficulties pupils faced when attempting to reintegrate into education following an exclusion. Pupils described their difficulty settling into a new provision: “so I hadn’t been in full school for about a month and so it was pretty hard for me to settle in” (PU4). Professionals and parents also recognised these difficulties and described pupils’ anxiety building during time out of school and their rigid thinking affecting reintegration, as pupils would feel all schools were “somewhere that [they] can’t be supported, nobody will listen to [them], nobody understands [them]” (EP4). Local authority professionals also described the pupils’ difficulties with re-establishing relationships, making new friendships and building trust in an alternative setting.

4.7. Findings for RQ4: What do professionals do to support the inclusion of young autistic people in mainstream school?

Three themes and eight subthemes were identified from the data from local authority professionals (Educational Psychologists and Autism Teachers) to answer RQ4 (Figure 14).

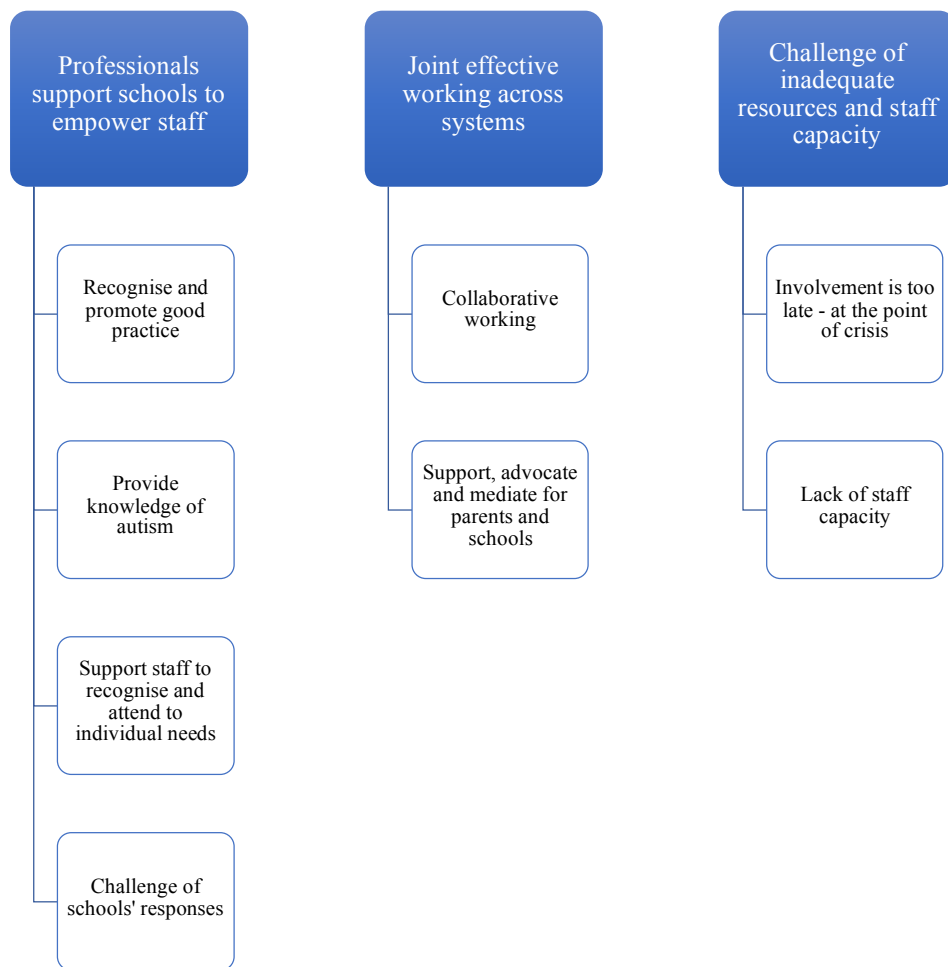


Figure 14. Thematic map for research question 4

4.7.1. Theme 1: Professionals support schools to empower staff.

Local authority professionals commented on their role in supporting schools to empower staff (Figure 15).

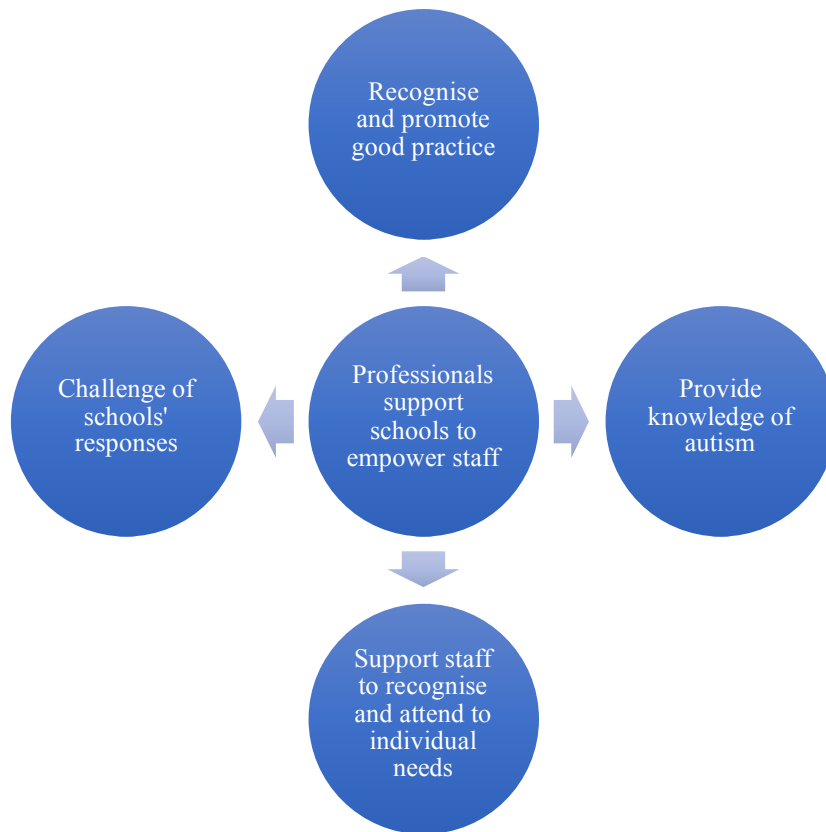


Figure 15. Theme 1 - Professionals support schools to empower staff

4.7.1.1. Subtheme: Recognise and promote good practice.

Recognising and promoting good practice to ensure the successful inclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum was mentioned by local authority professionals as a key aspect of their role. Professionals identified schools who were inclusive and areas or pockets of good practice. They also mentioned schools' willingness, responsibility and understanding to support pupils on the autism spectrum: "I feel personally, certainly with some of the schools I've worked with, they're much more willing to try and accommodate the needs of children with autism" (EP6). Professionals felt they had a role in pointing out these positives in a school and promoting further good practice, as EP4 explains she "think[s] about good practice and make[s] sure the schools are doing that".

4.7.1.2. Subtheme: Provide knowledge of autism.

Providing knowledge of autism was highlighted by local authority professionals. They recognised the importance of staff understanding: “It’s very much ensuring that the staff have a full understanding of how the autism impacts on them because I think if they don’t understand the impact then they don’t understand the behaviour” (AT2). Professionals discussed an autism review which took place in the county that led to autism training offered to every school as well as Autism Leads in schools to increase knowledge: “We’ve got things like the roll out of the [autism training], we had an autism review with all the recommendations” (AT3). Other professionals talked about providing schools with knowledge through individual casework and meetings as well as changing or challenging previous misconceptions by ensuring staff had knowledge to change their practice.

4.7.1.3. Subtheme: Support staff to recognise and attend to individual needs.

Professionals described a large part of their role as supporting staff to recognise and attend to individual needs. They helped to unpick the communication behind the behaviour and worked collaboratively with staff to understand how best to meet the needs of pupils: “so for me the approach is work in a very personalised way, a very person-centred way to actually understand what those unique needs are even though it’s autism it could be a range of needs within that” (EP1). Professionals also highlighted the further challenge of this when pupils had two or more diagnoses.

Professionals also discussed offering advice, strategies, resources and recommendations to school staff based on individual need. These included supporting pupils’ feelings of safety, providing routine, structure and consistency, recommending therapeutic input, providing social and emotional support, supporting with transitions, relationships, sensory differences, communication needs and organisational

difficulties, and developing pupils' independence. AT1 explained, "I think we're all knowledgeable and we all give some sound advice, we use lots of different approaches. I think we're quite strong at being needs led, so I think that works well".

4.7.1.4. Subtheme: Challenge of schools' responses.

Professionals described the challenge of schools' responses; how receptive schools were to support and whether they implemented advice. AT1 described some challenges she had encountered from schools, "Well I think the thing is that schools don't have to carry out the advice that we suggest". They highlighted frustration felt by professionals at schools not implementing their advice and the potential consequences of this:

It's other pupils being excluded, SEN needs not being met, therapies not being delivered, there is a lot of issues within these schools so it's trying to get to the heads to thrash out some of these issues. But there's myself, there's people from the advisory teams, there's the speech and language therapists, all these professionals sort of tearing their hair out because needs aren't being met and working out, I guess what we have to work out is the best way to approach it (EP3).

4.7.2. Theme 2: Joint effective working across systems.

Joint effective working across systems was a theme mentioned by respondents (Figure 16).

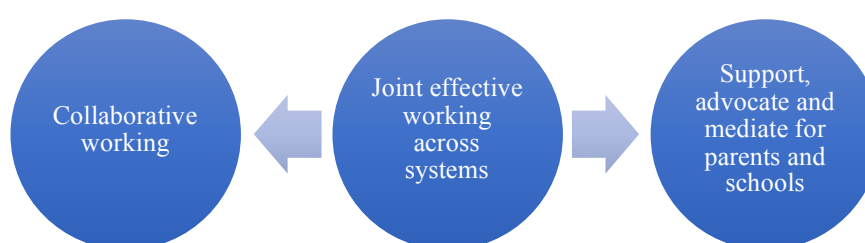


Figure 16. Theme 2 - Joint effective working across systems

4.7.2.1. Subtheme: Collaborative working.

Collaborative working was perceived to be a major part of what professionals do to support the inclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum, with many making reference to multi-professional working and building trusting relationships across systems to ensure effective practice.

We need to have a very joined up approach so I don't really see that EPs in isolation have a role with autism. I think it has to be across all three teams [SLT, autism team, EPS] and we have to share that, have the same message going out (EP3).

I feel I am part of the process. I don't make all the suggestions and change everything but they come out of the discussion, so I felt I was a cog in the wheel (EP2).

4.7.2.2. Subtheme: Support, advocate and mediate for parents and schools.

Professionals also felt a large part of their role when aiding the inclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum was supporting and advocating for parents. They mentioned having regular contact with parents, listening to parents, running support groups and training for parents, engaging parents and helping parents to support their children in the home. Professionals also discussed advocating as an important way to support parents: “it’s about working with the family and supporting the families, empowering the families to obviously tell the schools about their child because they know their child best” (EP1).

Professionals also highlighted the need to mediate between families and schools for the successful inclusion of pupils: AT3 explains, “the complexity of the relationship

between school and parents is one of the biggest factors in breakdown of placement”. Professionals discussed their role in mediating between these systems to ensure inclusion for pupils through facilitating discussions and promoting positive and professional relationships. EP5 stated, “I think a lot of my role is actually linking, facilitating between parents, young person and school and getting everyone to talk to each other”.

4.7.3. Theme 3: Challenge of inadequate resources and capacity of worker.

All professionals discussed the challenges they faced when supporting the inclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum, including late involvement and lack of staff capacity (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Theme 3 - Challenges of inadequate resources and staff capacity

4.7.3.1. Subtheme: Involvement is too late - at the point of crisis.

Many professionals described their involvement as too late, often at the point of crisis, where the pupil is at risk of exclusion, which resulted in very negative educational experiences, including exclusion from school: “I mean unfortunately we would like to work in a more preventative way, it’s a little bit late in the day in terms of being called in, that we are at the point where a placement is breaking down” (EP1). Many professionals emphasised the need for earlier interventions. One suggested that professionals could help schools identify early warnings signs; some felt this could stop

mental health difficulties developing. However, one professional believed that for some pupils, early intervention may not have changed the final outcome of exclusion.

4.7.3.2. Subtheme: Lack of staff capacity.

Professionals felt confident that they were supporting in the right ways but felt a lack of capacity due to limited capacity and too much statutory work.

What can the county do? Employ more EPs would be my answer, I think we've got the right teams in place, I think it's just about supporting, being able to support the schools more. I don't think there's anybody that magically needs to come in or any more magic training, I think it is all there but it's the availability of it (EP4).

Well, I mean in an ideal world if we had endless capacity there are amazing programs and things we could be offering (AT3).

Other professionals felt they needed more time to follow up with more children, complete therapeutic work, offer parent and community support, model recommendations directly with children to ensure correct implementation and complete small group work. Professionals recognised a lack of contact with children and young people as a result of staff capacity. Respondents mentioned having little contact with pupils: EP3 stated, "The only time with pupils is for statutory" and EP6 noted a decline in the level of contact she had, "Well since we've been working to the consultation model it's less than it used to be to be honest". Some professionals felt unable to build trusting relationships with pupils due to lack of contact: "I don't really form proper

relationships with the children, it's more about giving advice and getting their views” (AT1).

4.8. Findings for RQ5: What are the features of alternative provision that enable pupils on the autism spectrum?

Figure 18 shows the five themes and 22 subthemes, which were identified from the data from pupils, parents and teachers regarding RQ5 (Figure 18).

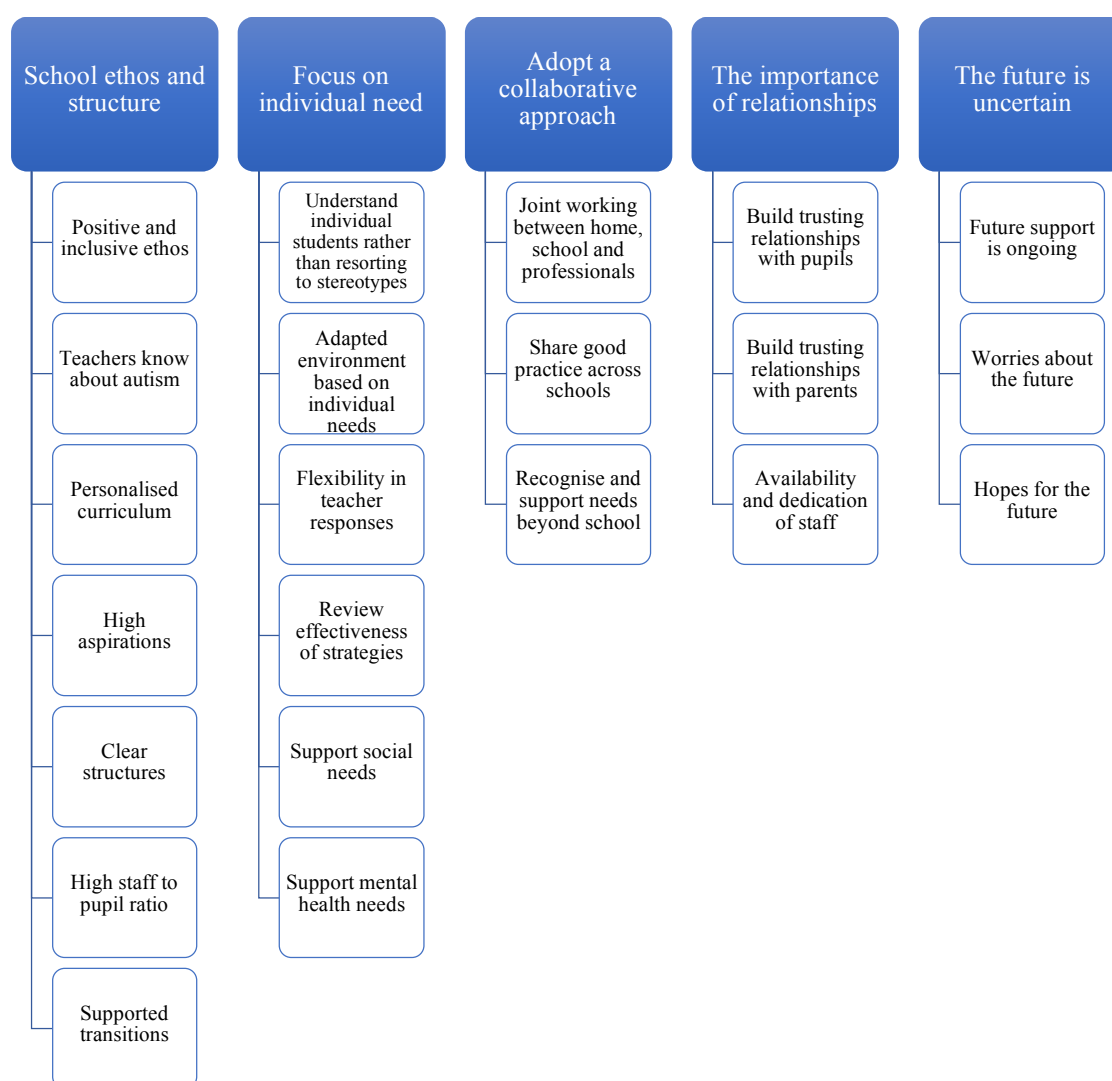


Figure 18. Thematic map for research question 5

4.8.1. Theme 1: School ethos and structure.

School ethos and structure was mentioned by respondents as a positive aspect of the alternative provisions (Figure 19).

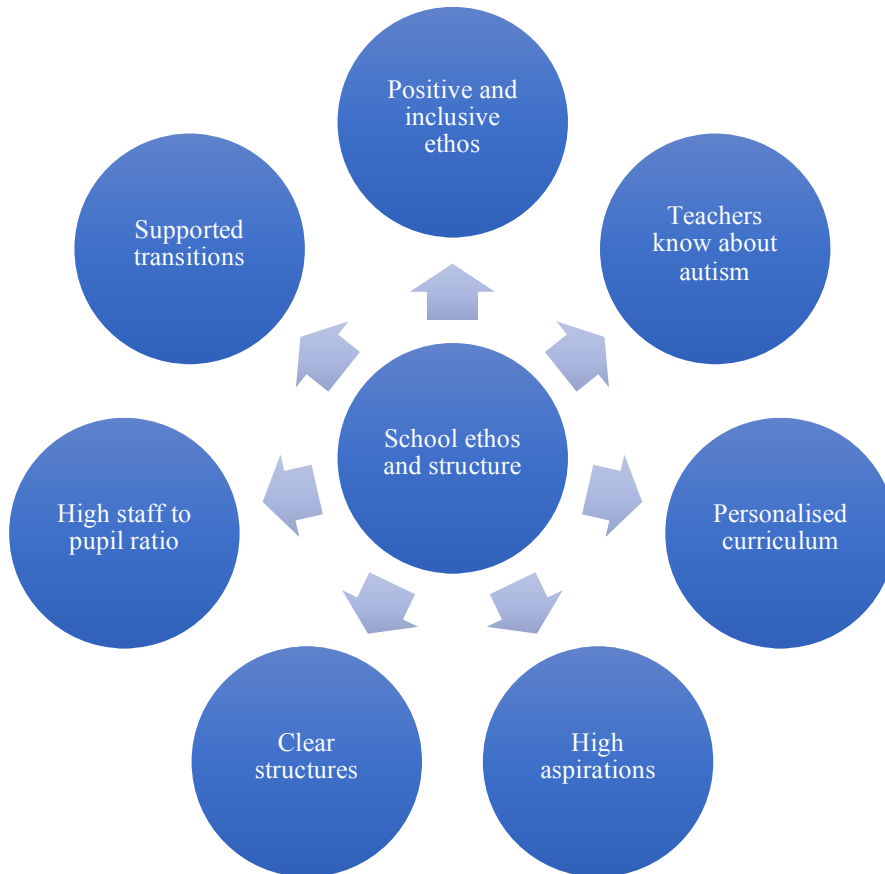


Figure 19. Theme 1 - School ethos and structure

4.8.1.1. Subtheme Positive and inclusive ethos.

Parents and teachers discussed the positive and inclusive ethos present in the APs and teachers shared their positive perspectives towards pupils on the autism spectrum.

If you think about it from an evolutionary perspective, it was probably exceptionally essential to the development of the human race, because I very much doubt if we hadn't had people with heightened awareness, we'd never

have discovered fire, because it certainly wouldn't be a neurotypical that's sitting there rubbing sticks or the twigs together for hours on end (T3).

There's a real sense here, all of our kids accept each other's differences and they all understand that there's different things, different quirks they might have and they're very accepting (T7).

It's all positive and it's all focusing on getting that child to do his best, or her best, that's the impression I always got when I spoke to these guys here (PA2).

4.8.1.2. Subtheme: Teachers know about autism.

Pupils, parents and the teacher recognised the staffs' understanding of autism. PU6 commented, "Other than just being well trained teachers, yup well trained, that's probably a good starting point, yup they know how to deal with my needs" and PA7 stated, "They've got a group of highly trained teachers who understand it, they understand the complexities around the comorbidities". Teachers also discussed their understanding of autism and talked about the ways in which they maintained or built on this understanding.

So, I kinda feel as though my knowledge base is increasing, and there's quite a bit of expertise within my organisation as well through our autism lead teacher (T4).

I think you know it's a really, the training we have, a real mixture of training, so some of it's you know specialist, professional comes in and talk to us, some

of it's in house, you sort of always feel supported, if there's something I'm struggling with I can always go to a colleague and they'll give me some ideas, my knowledge has really improved since I came here and I just feel a lot more, yeah equipped to deal with (T7).

4.8.1.3. Subtheme: Personalised curriculum.

Pupils commented on the flexibility and choice available regarding the curriculum, shorter days and activities alongside academics: “They're quite flexible with the timetable” (PU9). Parents discussed tailored timetables, a focus on key subjects and opportunities to pursue interests. Parents also felt there was a balance between subjects available: “they have the right balance of stuff” (PA9). Teachers recognised the importance of teaching skills alongside academic subjects as T3 explained, “We have two members of staff who are qualified social workers, who do the life skills in what's called the life skills house”. T1 from provision one mentioned that mainstream schools may be able to provide a wider academic range but that they offered alternatives, “mainstream education generally in terms of academics is able to provide a wider curriculum, however we have a more extensive range of vocational qualifications and practical qualifications”. This perspective was not shared by teachers from provision two, however.

4.8.1.4. Subtheme: High aspirations.

Respondents commented on the APs as having high aspirations for the young people, including further education, higher education and employment. Pupils shared these aspirations, “Yeah I'm doing qualifications, I think, yeah like GCSEs, definitely doing them, one thing of the 5 Cs that they require to start doing paramedic stuff, I will do that so I've got a plan for the future” (PU6). Parents noted a change in pupil's

aspirations since attending the provision: PA8 described her foster son's aspirations as being a result of attending the AP, "You know he had no aspirations or anything; he would have just jogged through life probably on benefits, whereas now he's talking about college, he's doing work experience". Teachers shared these aspirations, "I'd like to see [pupil] go to university" (T8). Pupils demonstrated a real desire to learn and often mentioned the importance of receiving an education. PU2 said he would feel, "quite educated" in his ideal school.

However, pupils and parents in provision one were worried about the challenge of work in the AP, PU1 said he felt mainstream school "challenged me a lot more" and PA1 agreed, "I think they could probably stretch him more academically, he's got a little bit complacent there, he's a bright child". These views were not shared by parents and pupils in provision two.

4.8.1.5. Subtheme: Clear structures.

Parents, teachers and pupils commented on the clear structures of the APs being of benefit to the autistic pupils. Teachers felt pupils were happier "knowing what the day looks like" (T5) and parents commented on routine: "I think they understand that, the kids they need that routine" (PA9). Pupils described their desire for structure and the lack thereof in mainstream school. Parents commented on previous difficulties during unstructured times as PA1 explained, "he doesn't have much unstructured time which works really well for him, break times are difficult". Teachers in the AP also recognised study periods as unstructured times and managed this accordingly. T6 talked about introducing structure into study times, "so he likes that kinda structure and the way we've responded. Each of those study sessions are actually timetabled to a member of staff to set work for him to do, I've set up a folder for him that he can access on the school's system so all his work from me is in there".

4.8.1.6. Subtheme: High staff to pupil ratio.

All participant groups discussed the high staff-to-pupil ratio in the APs and the benefit of one-to-one teaching or small-group classes. This allowed the students to receive personalised lessons and more support, limit the distractions from peers and have an opportunity to build relationships with their teachers. PU1 commented, “with three of us if you wanna know anything it will be answered, he hasn’t got to go around a lot of people”. T3 also highlighted the benefits of one-to-one teaching, “I think he enjoys the fact that it’s one to one, because it means he can be taught the way that he likes to be taught”.

4.8.1.7. Subtheme: Supported transitions

Parents of pupils attending provision two commented on the personalised support given surrounding the transition into the provision, including gradual transitions, building relationships with staff members and discussing expectations:

There’s a gentleman, who mentors new students, he comes to visit the house before to talk to [son] with me there about any expectations he’s got, if he’s got any special things he needs, if he wants to bring a certain type of pen, a certain type of snack, a drink, and explain to him about his timetable and everything which was very good, and it was done on [son’s] home ground (PA5).

Well he didn’t come in full time, he came for I think it was half a day or something, and then he, when he first started he was only here for half a day for about a week, and then after a week they put him full time, so they kind of transitioned him like that (PA3).

4.8.2. Theme 2: Focus on individual need.

All respondents emphasised the importance of focusing on the individual and adapting the teaching, curriculum, environment and teacher responses accordingly (Figure 20).

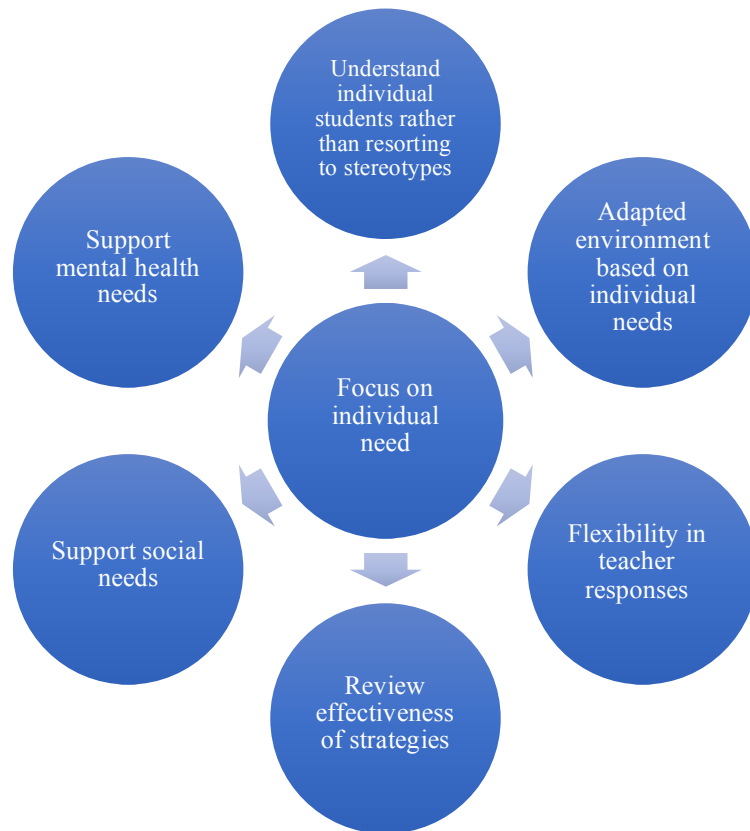


Figure 20. Theme 2 - Focus on individual need

4.8.2.1. Subtheme: Understand individual students rather than resorting to stereotypes.

Teachers and pupils commented on the importance of moving away from autism stereotypes and focusing instead on the individual. PU8 commented on misconceptions of autism, “Don’t read it from the books, people think autism is just a learning difficulty but autism is much more than that”. Teachers also emphasised the importance of being aware of needs but also mindful of individual differences:

Apparently, you can't possibly have autistic people around if you ain't got a sensory room, you know like I say you can't have loud noises, well we've got a drum kit and you know a bass guitar and a rock and roll thing there, we're still very aware that due to the nature of the spectrum they do have things (T6).

Every kid is an individual and they all need individual attention, programs, support whatever, you can't say oh right well I can support an autistic kid because I can do such and such (T8).

Parents also discussed the teachers' success at getting to know the children on an individual level: "they tapped into his personality and brought it out" (PA10); "They're very good at understanding individuals" (PA5). T1 explained the processes in the AP surrounding getting to know pupils individually:

But for all our students when they are new here we do a case study, so we look at everything from their family tree, who they are living with, negative experiences that they may have had in their lives either in education or outside of education, and look at what his feelings could be in relation to those experiences and what sort of negative behaviours we have seen either here at [school name] or that have been reported in the past, and so we do this sort of roots and fruits tree (T1).

Teachers also commented on many individual strategies they used with pupils based on individual need, including a variety of resources and teaching approaches. They were very aware of both the pupils' unique strengths and differences. Teachers also discussed

the pupils' previous educational experiences: "You know kids who come here have usually had a pretty rough ride and they've been through the mill" (T4). Teachers used this to understand the pupils and commented on the effect this may have on pupils' current engagement with learning, trust in adults, self-esteem, confidence and views of school: "You've got to take slow steps because they've had such poor experiences in the past" (T8).

4.8.2.2. Subtheme: Adapted environment based on individual need.

All respondent groups mentioned the importance of adapting the environment based on the individual needs of pupils. Pupils' recognised environment supports: "I like that they have a sensory room" (PU7); "One other thing is that I listen to music quietly in lessons as well which helps a lot" (PU5). Parents commented on the adaptations which support with learning: "They've accommodated that so they don't make a big thing of it, he goes out for a five-minute walk with someone he comes back, again that works pretty well for him" (PA1). Teachers also recognised environmental support offered: "He probably likes the smaller groups but doesn't like being on his own, but he likes the calmness of the smaller groups" (T2) and sensory supports in the provision: "You know to have fiddle toys around or to allow sensory breaks" (T3).

4.8.2.3. Subtheme: Flexibility in teacher responses based on individual need.

All respondent groups felt strongly that flexibility was a key approach for the success of these pupils in the provision. Pupils described the flexibility in the provision: "they can be adjustable in terms of certain behaviour, for instance I really like to lean back in chairs and stuff but it's not a problem" (PU5). Teachers also talked about flexible techniques they used to ensure pupils' needs were met.

And so, one of the ways I found in order to help him settle down at the beginning of the lesson is actually let him have some cricket task or cricket discussion with me, and so then it instantly kind of got off his chest what he needed to get off his chest (T4).

Parents commented on the flexibility in responses leading to a lack of punishments placed on pupils and instead opportunities to learn and move forward:

So, they sort of encourage that as well, work along with them and don't mind too much if he has a day off, then ok he has a day off, then we will get up and we carry on with tomorrow. There is no punishment but you get what I mean it is not considered bad behaviour it's like ok that's a wobble move on (PA6).

He made a very inappropriate comment to this child around, I think this child's in care, [he said] 'well at least I have come from a loving family' ...but instead of excluding...they sort of spent the day doing work away from everybody but also having a lot of conversations around the impact of what he'd said, and also there was a boy who's apparently now a mentor there...who was in care who came and spoke to [son] about what it was actually like and for me that was quite interesting because actually that seemed to me the best kind of approach (PA7).

4.8.2.4. Subtheme: Review effectiveness of strategies based on individual need.

Alongside an understanding and response based on individual needs, teachers also described the constant review of the effectiveness of their strategies based on the

individual response, “so, we constantly reviewing and revising what we do for, for this young person who’s on the spectrum” (T5).

4.8.2.5. Subtheme: Support individual social needs.

Supporting individual social needs was mentioned by both parents and teachers. Teachers mentioned careful consideration surrounding peer groupings, planned group work, teaching social boundaries and appropriate use of language, supporting relationship building and ongoing incidental teaching of social skills. TU7 talked about an autism social group, “She comes to the autism enrichment program, it’s like a youth club really” and discussed adapting the social environment for pupils based on individual need:

We think quite carefully about groups when she came last year she was in groups with different young people that not only matched her academically but were people that we thought she would get along with to try and build those friendships in a safe environment (TU7).

Parents also discussed supports in place in the school for the development of pupils’ social skills. PA8 described supports, “I think just taking them to the cinema and out for lunch and things like that is you know they’re doing it, without doing it if you know what I mean”. PA10 also explained:

Only recently [teacher] said that they’re using, [son] been given some cards and they’re prompt cards as to how he socially interacts with his tutors, so that he’ll say hello how are you, or how was your weekend, so [son] is practicing those.

However, one parent talked about the negative peer influences she felt her child was exposed to in the provision, and the negative impact these had on his behaviour: “Like I said he’s been exposed to children he’s never been exposed to before, behaviour he’s never seen before which he has copied to fit in” (PA1).

4.8.2.6. Subtheme: Support individual mental health needs.

Parents and teachers also discussed the support available in the provision for pupils’ mental health needs. Teachers recognised the unique mental health needs of pupils and discussed the support they offered, including helping with self-esteem, confidence, providing a nurturing environment, removing stressors and teaching self-awareness. T4 mentioned the mental health support alongside academics, “So in addition to our kind of GCSE’s and our academic side we also do quite a lot of therapeutic lessons and sessions” and T1 discussed a specific emotional development intervention, “They also do [intervention] which is kind of like, I suppose in a nutshell it’s like an anger management sort of course”.

Parents noticed the positive impact this was having on their children, including fewer sensory and behavioural issues. Parents described their children as more relaxed, open and confident. PA4 described her son’s progress, “He’s now able to be much more open, to understand his emotions much better”. Parents also commented that teachers “are looking after these kids” (PA7). However, one teacher said he felt unequipped to deal with these needs, “But yeah the mental health side of things is difficult cos we don’t have the expertise” (T6).

4.8.3. Theme 3: Adopt a collaborative approach.

Adopting a collaborative approach was recognised as a key feature by all respondent groups (Figure 21).



Figure 21. Theme 3 - Adopt a collaborative approach

4.8.3.1. Subtheme: Joint working between home, school and professionals.

Teachers discussed the importance of joint decision making between the home, school and the young person. T5 referred to decisions about pupils moving on from the provision, “So, it’s an ongoing discussion I would think, with the parents the young person, us as a staff and the mainstream school if they’re prepared to take the young person on”.

Teachers also mentioned the joint work they do with external professionals: “We use the Educational Psychologist to ensure that, you know staff are also well versed in ideas and she’s fantastic at working with us” (T3); “Have people, experts come in and talk and do different things” (T2). Teachers and parents also discussed internal professionals. T3 mentioned a school counsellor and parents talked about social workers in the school.

4.8.3.2. Subtheme: Share good practice across schools.

Sharing good practice across schools was also mentioned by teachers. They talked about sharing their good practice with other mainstream schools as well as working with others to receive knowledge of good practice:

It's quite good so we're, we will support other mainstream secondary schools where they don't know what to do with particular autistic young people or how to approach their education or their curriculum (T4).

I'm delivering training myself and I have got support in terms of a member of staff at [a different school] who's going to come in to support me with my training, she will obviously know a lot more than me and we've already met a couple of times and we've talked about what we are going to be (T5).

4.8.3.3. Subtheme: Recognise and support needs beyond school.

Recognising and supporting the needs of pupils beyond school was emphasised by all participant groups. The school offers a social and emotional education: "I think they discuss home life, activities and you know sort of friends and relationships and things like that" (PA8). Teachers acknowledge the need for support outside the school and during school holidays: "If students have difficulty coming into school we'll go home and teach them at home" (T3); "So we do a lot of trips during the holidays because some of our kids they would just sit, you know for a whole week and do nothing" (T7). Parents also mentioned support they receive through the school's parent support group and they felt comfortable asking for support with difficulties experienced outside of school.

Because what had happened was he was taking photos, so of course he's committed an offence himself even though he doesn't get it, do you see what I mean, he's sending them to men that were much older than him who shouldn't be and I, whether it's around, I think he's definitely confused about his sexuality. But I do feel that the school, that [name of AP] will, I'm hoping, as much as any institution could do, I could have the conversation with them around how we best support him with that and I don't have to be embarrassed about it and I don't have to feel I have to, what's the word, again, finesse things to sort of play it down (PA7).

4.8.4. Theme 4: The importance of relationships.

The importance of relationships was recognised by all participant groups. This included relationships between school staff, parents and pupils (Figure 22).

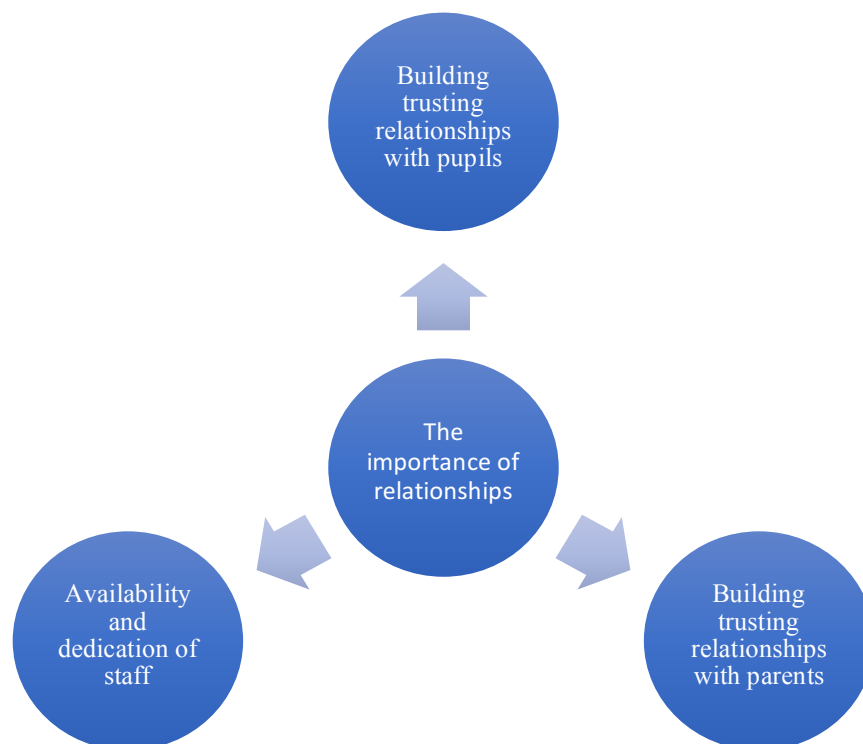


Figure 22. Theme 4 - The importance of relationships

4.8.4.1. Subtheme: Build trusting relationships with pupils.

Building trusting relationships was mentioned frequently by all participant groups. All pupils talked about the teachers in the AP positively, describing them as “fun”, “caring”, “trusting”, “nice” and “kind”. PU2 stated, “I think they were just like listening to what I had to say, they were willing to listen. I felt you could trust everyone here” and PU4 described his relationship with teachers, “I find there’s more of a connection”. Many pupils chose teachers from the APs as teachers in their ideal school.

Parents also commented on the positive relationships between staff and pupils: they highlighted teacher characteristics in the AP as “calm”, “caring”, “non-judgmental”, “trusting”, “respectful” and “sensitive”.

His tutor, she’s just an amazing lady, she actually knows probably more about how [son] is feeling than I do because she teaches him, and she’s got to know him so well she actually gets him and nobody else including his father probably has got that understanding of [son] (PA4).

He’s become quite trusting of the teachers so that’s positive, he’s started to open up a lot more, they’re finding that got to know him fairly well because they take the time to get to know him (PA1).

Teachers also recognised the importance of building trusting relationships with pupils. They discussed building trust, keeping promises, listening, getting to know the pupil, respecting pupils and being non-judgmental. T8 talked about his mentee’s relationships: “I think he trusts everybody I guess, just trying to be open and listen to him”.

4.8.4.2. Subtheme: Build trusting relationships with parents.

Parents and teachers highlighted building trusting relationships with parents as a positive aspect of the APs. Teachers valued the input from parents: “But they’re a great resource, it seems bloody stupid doesn’t it, if you’re trying to get to know someone to ignore the person whose been with them the longest” (T6). They also discussed the frequent contact with parents: “He always knows I ring his mum every Friday at 3.15pm and then any other time if something major comes up” (T2). Parents also commented on the supportive relationship they had with teachers: “They’ll phone me up and they’ll phone up with little things, so they’re not saying it’s a bad thing, they’re just saying well we’re aware of this problem and here’s what we’re going to do” (PA6). One parent commented on the headteacher’s understanding: “And you know the headteacher gets it and he get and he understands how parents feel” (PA7)

4.8.4.3. Subtheme: Availability and dedication of staff.

The availability of staff was also highlighted by parents and teachers as a positive aspect of AP:

I’m his mentor I keep contact with him and his mum, I make sure every morning that he’s, he’s ok, you know see how he’s doing and if there’s any kind of concerns on a particular day, obviously, I will deal with those (T3).

Parents and teachers also discussed the dedication of staff to the pupils. PA9 described the support her son received:

I think [son] had to feel confident enough to be there and that, that took him a year to get to that point, for them to sort of like have that time whereas a lot of

places would never have given him that amount of time, they would have just gone, you know so I think they, they done amazing.

Teachers in the AP expressed dedication to pupils in the interview, “We’re gonna do this for as long as you’re [pupil] in this school, you know we will keep moving forward, we will keep going” (T8) and others commented on their colleagues’ dedication, “I think the other thing that really strikes me here is the willingness of the staff to be really open to trying, and learning, and doing new things and open to learning about autism in different ways” (T3).

4.8.5. Theme 5: The future is uncertain.

All participant groups discussed the young people’s future in the provision and after the provision. Uncertainty, worries and hopes were highlighted (Figure 23).

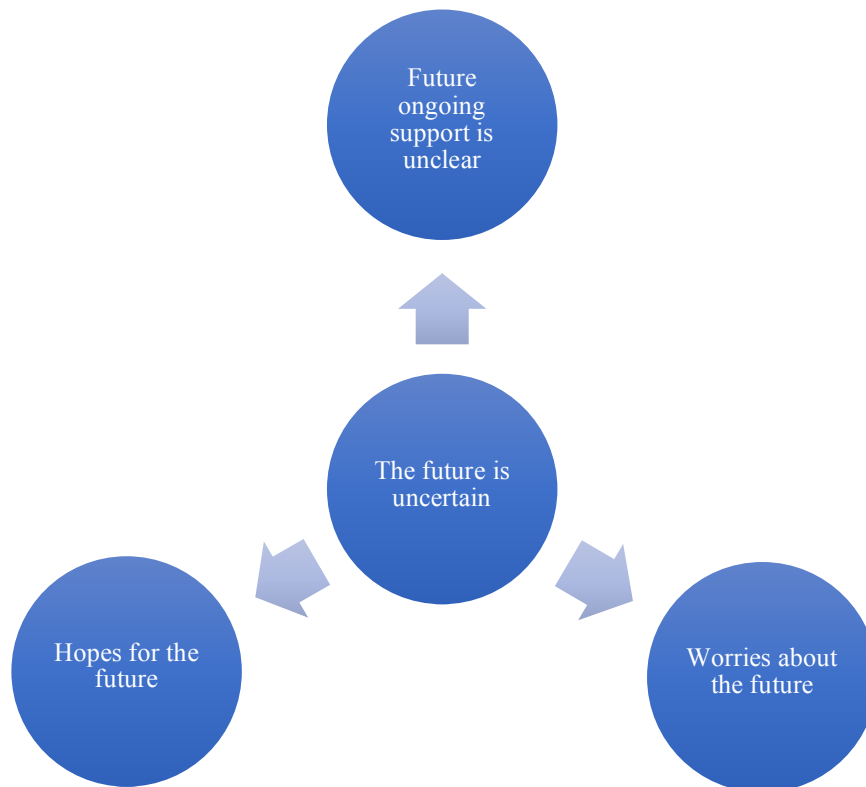


Figure 23. Theme 5 – The future is uncertain

4.8.5.1. Subtheme: Future ongoing support is unclear.

Pupils were unclear about the support they would need in the future, PU2 who had applied for college stated, “Well I think I filled out a form to say I’ve got autism and they said ‘oh ok, that’s fine’ and I think they put a support teacher in there”. Parents highlighted the level of support they felt their children needed in the future.

If he goes into some sort of university or college setting then obviously he would need some sort of like heavy support because even now when he has two people in the class it was a stretch for him which is why he/s not ready to go to college yet, if he goes straight into some sort of apprenticeship then obviously he would need some sort of support doing that (PA5).

He would need a very good transition into a very understanding environment which fulfils his academic ability but at the same time meets his social need (PA4).

Teachers discussed their attempts at securing future support for their pupils. T4 explained, “We try and build links where we can with other secondary schools and national colleges as well” and T2 explained support they offered for their learners’ futures, “so we will take him to college interviews, we will take him to interviews, we will do anything to help him, we will take him along to things”.

4.8.5.2. Subtheme: Worries about the future.

Worries about the future were mentioned by all respondent groups. Pupils seemed worried about how long they would remain in the provision: “I have no, I don’t know, hopefully it will be, my prime goal is to maybe stay until the year 10” (PU4). Parents

were also unsure about the length of time their child would remain in the provision: PA9 was waiting for a decision about a sixth form place, “They’re talking, we’re still waiting to know if he’s got another year, which I’m hoping he will have, I think he needs that other year”.

Some were worried about their child leaving the provision: “Oh god, I don’t want him to leave here [the AP]” (PA3). PA4 explained her fears, “I guess my worry now is that he’s so stable at that school when it comes to the end of the next academic year he’ll be just dropped like a stone, and he’ll be out in the real world and actually he’s not able to cope with that”. Other pupils did not want to think about the future after the provision and found it difficult to answer questions. Some pupils did not present as worried and instead seemed used to the uncertainty in life: “I tend to go wherever the wind takes me really, if I feel like I need to go I’ll go” (PU8). Teachers shared pupils’ and parents’ fears: “We’ve sort of taken that approach where the only thing we can really control is the environment here and what the kids are doing here so you know we work on that one and like I say it’s a little bit of a wing and a prayer when they go” (T6).

4.8.5.3. Subtheme: Hopes for the future.

Teachers and parents highlighted their hopes and aspirations for the pupils’ futures. Parents felt their children had been given a future due to attending the AP: “You know, he has a future now whereas before he didn’t, there was no future for him” (PA6); “I think he now thinks he has a future” (PA8). PA5 shared her hopes for her son’s future, “get into a profession, or go to university, whatever he wants to do” (PA8). Teachers also hoped they had equipped the pupils for college: “The transition to where he goes after he leaves school will be more difficult I think. We’ve equipped him to deal with what he’s going to face while he’s there” (T8).

5. Discussion

5.1. Chapter summary

This chapter will further discuss the findings related to each research question in the context of relevant literature. In line with the ecological systems theory, which recognises the importance of the relationship between the individual and their environment, conclusions are drawn from both the qualitative and quantitative findings. This approach allows for the discussion of the influence of multiple systems which are affecting the inclusion and exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum in this study (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

5.2. Summary of main findings

Children and young people on the autism spectrum experience worryingly high rates of school exclusion, yet there is limited research into this area and little is known about the factors contributing to their school exclusion experiences. The current study adopted a multi-informant approach in an attempt to identify the experiences of young people in one local authority to understand both the child-, school- and system- level factors that potentially contribute to the exclusion experiences of these young people. Overall, pupils in this study reported overwhelming negative accounts of their school exclusion experiences. The quantitative data in this study showed variation in individual characteristics of the sample of pupils excluded from school, thus suggesting that exclusion does not result from individual factors alone and that school exclusion can occur for a range of autistic pupils' showing varying need. Instead, the school exclusion experiences seem to result from the school-level and system-level factors, including aspects of the mainstream environment pupils found challenging, fragmented education of pupils, lack of professional involvement and a complex system parents found themselves fighting against to secure appropriate education for their children.

Despite mainly positive accounts of excluded pupils' current educational experiences within provisions, the suitability of APs for pupils on the autism spectrum was also questioned.

5.3. Research Question 1: What are the characteristics of pupils on the autism spectrum who experience school exclusion?

Pupils in this study had higher autistic features, more sensory needs, increased behaviour difficulties and lower quality of life compared to the typical population. However, the sample demonstrated expected characteristics in line with the autism population given the distinct needs of autism (APA, 2013) and the behavioural difficulties and lower quality of life experienced by such pupils in previous studies (Dominick et al., 2007; Ikeda et al., 2014). However, what is important to note is the wide variation in scores for individual pupils on all measures highlighting that school exclusion is occurring for autistic pupils with varying characteristics and needs and not those showing the most significant needs.

Overall, autistic adolescents from this study had higher scores in the low registration, sensory sensitivity and sensation avoiding quadrants (indicating more of these behaviours), and lower scores in the sensory seeking quadrant (indicating less of these behaviours). This same pattern in sensory needs was identified by Crane et al. (2009) in autistic adults. Pupils demonstrated the most behavioural difficulties in the peer problems and emotional difficulties scales on the SDQ and they had lowest scores in psychosocial measures on the Peds QL, which encompasses emotional, social and school functioning; pupils scored the lowest scores in the social category. These results are unsurprising as social communication difficulties are a distinct need of autistic pupils and these pupils often experience co-occurring mental health needs (Simonoff et al., 2008). These findings are further supported by the qualitative data in this research,

which emphasised pupils' social and mental health needs. While pupils were mainly positive about their current experiences in the APs, the negative impact of their previous school experiences on their current schooling cannot be underestimated and may explain their low scores on school functioning. Pupils commented on emotional trauma connected to school and discussed difficulties reengaging in education after an exclusion. Additionally, the low physical scores may result from the physical manifestations of mental health recognised in the qualitative data, for example, being sick from anxiety.

Hyperactivity scores on the SDQ were slightly raised which may reflect the comorbidity within the sample; three out of twelve pupils had a diagnosis of ADHD and two of these pupils had the highest individual scores on this scale. Conduct scores also fell within the slightly raised category. However, closely considering the individual statements on the SDQ which make up the conduct domain, some of these statements could be seen to relate to the needs of individuals on the autism spectrum; for example, 'often has temper tantrums' may relate to emotional difficulties experienced by individuals on the autism spectrum (Simonoff et al., 2008) and 'often fights with other children' may be related to the social difficulties autistic individuals face (APA, 2013). The impact score from the SDQ suggested the child's behavioural difficulties had a large impact on the child and their family, which was also corroborated by the qualitative data.

However, what is important to note is the wide variation in scores for individual pupils on all measures indicates variation in the characteristics of pupils on the autism spectrum excluded from school. This result is surprising as one might expect the autistic pupils in this sample to show the most significant needs, or a particular set of characteristics, compared to the autism population overall, given they have been unable

to manage in and excluded from mainstream school. It could be argued that this variation at least in part demonstrates that it is not necessarily the characteristics of pupils which lead to school exclusion, but rather the schools' response to these characteristics. For example, pupils may demonstrate different cognitive abilities but all need adapted teaching styles to suit their learning differences. The results highlights the importance of recognising school exclusion as resulting from the interaction between the child and their environment, and not solely from within-child factors. It is how the school responds to the child and manages their needs that should lead to successful inclusion or exclusion, a perspective which fits within the social model of disability and the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Oliver, 1986). It is therefore vital that EPs are making school staff aware that a range of autistic pupils, with varying needs, are vulnerable to school exclusion.

Alongside this perspective it is important to note that some of these characteristics, behaviour difficulties and lower quality of life, may not have contributed to the pupils' school exclusions but rather *resulted from* the pupils' negative exclusion experiences. This viewpoint is supported by the qualitative data which highlighted the deteriorating mental health needs and social isolation experienced by these pupils after an exclusion, resulting in behavioural difficulties and having a negative impact on their quality of life.

5.4. Research Question 2: Which factors contribute to the exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum from mainstream school?

Challenges of accessing mainstream secondary schools, challenges of navigating the social world and the psychological impact of coping were recognised in this sample as the main factors leading to the school exclusions of pupils on the autism spectrum, in line with previous research (Brede et al., 2017; Sproston et al., 2017).

Overall, pupils experienced very negative educational experiences and emphasised difficulties accessing mainstream school. In line with previous research, this study found that mainstream schools were reported to lack inclusivity and teacher awareness at a whole school level and that the physical environment acted as a barrier for autistic pupils (Brede et al., 2017; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Saggars, 2015; Scuitto et al., 2012; Sproston et al., 2017). Additionally, homework, transitions, limited contact with parents and accessing the curriculum has been also highlighted previously (Chown & Beavan, 2012; Connor, 2000; Dillon et al., 2016; Hill, 2004; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a; Humphrey & Symes, 2011; Madriaga & Goodley, 2010; Makin, 2017; Parsons et al., 2011; Ravet, 2001; Sproston et al., 2017).

In this study, homework was perceived to be a direct cause of pupils' mental health needs and subsequent self-exclusion. This may be explained by rigid thinking; being unable to see work as something that is completed at home (APA, 2013), literal thinking; pupils struggling to understand why schoolwork is being referred to as homework (Dillon & Underwood, 2012) or unclear expectations; pupils being unsure how to complete the homework due to lack of structure. Pupils also expressed their need for downtime at home after coping with the social demands of school and saw homework as a barrier to this. It seems that the negative consequences of the pressure to complete homework far outweighed the benefits of completing homework for these young people. This study also extended the current research in this area by highlighting school rules as an additional factor contributing to exclusion; with schools implementing rigid rules or school systems driven by social rules that were difficult for pupils on the autism spectrum to understand, given their social and communication difficulties (APA, 2013). Mainstream schools have high expectations of pupils and were reportedly inflexible in their responses and expectations, regardless of special

educational needs. Through consultation EPs can support schools to consider how to make reasonable adjustments in the mainstream environment to ensure fair access for autistic pupils, this could include flexibility regarding homework and school rules.

The challenges pupils faced navigating the social world was a major factor resulting in the exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum (Brede et al., 2017; Sproston et al., 2017). Difficulties with peer relationships was expected given the distinct social and communication needs of pupils on the autism spectrum and the social complexity of secondary school (Chown & Beavan, 2012; Sciutto et al., 2012). In line with previous research, a lack of social understanding reportedly led to incidents of social vulnerability, social isolation, a lack of peer support and bullying of these pupils (Brede et al., 2016; Carrington & Graham, 2001; Connor, 2000; Dillon et al., 2016; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Humphrey & Symes, 2010; Makin et al., 2017; Sproston et al., 2017). One female pupil who received a late diagnosis discussed her experiences of social isolation and bullying. It has been suggested that autistic females ‘camouflage’ their social difficulties, which can place them at increased risk of bullying and social isolation, particularly if they do not receive a diagnosis (Attwood, 2007; Dean et al., 2014; Lai et al., 2011). This social isolation and bullying led to pupils’ self-excluding due to fear of permanent exclusions as some autistic pupils responded to bullies through physical aggression. Despite the social challenges faced by pupils on the autism spectrum, these young people wanted friendships, to belong and some discussed missing friends from their mainstream schools. This study further challenges the dominant discourse that autistic pupils do not want friends and supports the limited research highlighting autistic pupils’ desire for friendship (Calder, Hill & Pellicano, 2013). Pupils, however, did not want the social elements of school to affect learning and many drew their ideal school with few, or no other pupils in their classrooms. This

should not be interpreted as them not wanting friends, but rather them seeing the classroom as a place for learning and not socialising.

The psychological impact of coping in a mainstream environment was a major factor affecting the school exclusion of these pupils. This was anticipated given that it is widely acknowledged that pupils on the autism spectrum are more likely to have mental health difficulties (Clarke et al., 2017, Kussikko et al., 2008; Simonoff et al., 2008,) and the recognised psychological impact of negative educational experiences, including exclusion (Brede et al., 2017; Humphrey & Symes, 2013; Parsons et al., 2011; Sproston et al., 2017). Pupils with mental health difficulties felt unsupported in mainstream schools and did not develop coping strategies to manage these needs; consequently mental health needs were exacerbated. Previous research has indicated that mainstream teachers feel ill-equipped to deal with the emotional needs of autistic pupils (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a). These unmet mental health needs often led to pupils' feeling emotionally dysregulated which resulted in behaviour often leading to exclusion. For autistic pupils to manage successfully in mainstream school, appropriate steps need to be made to ensure they are positively included; with adaptations based on individual need and an ongoing psychosocial curriculum for pupils who require support with the increasingly complex social world of secondary school. Schools need to support the mental health needs of pupils as recommended in legislation but may need some support to do this effectively from trained professionals (DfE, 2016). EPs can play a key role in supporting schools to ensure the social needs and mental health needs of pupils are being supported in school.

5.5. Research Question 3: What happens during the process of exclusion for pupils on the autism spectrum?

To understand the school exclusion experiences fully, system-level factors were explored within the process of the exclusion. The process of school exclusion is lengthy and complex for pupils on the autism spectrum and their families. Pupils spend significant amounts of time out of education while parents struggle to navigate the complex system in an attempt to secure an appropriate education for their children. School exclusion, although varying in type, results in negative consequences for autistic pupils and puts a strain on family life.

The findings in this research demonstrate variety in reasons for and type of exclusions, but all seem to result from unmet needs and lack of understanding. In line with previous research and government statistics, behaviour was commonly cited as a reason for exclusion, however this research recognises behaviour as a consequence of unmet needs, particularly mental health needs (Brede et al., 2017; DfE, 2017a). Additionally, a lack of diagnosis also contributed to exclusion as this led to lack of understanding from teachers. However, it is well known that diagnostic processes for autism are long and schools should be accommodating based on individual need rather than waiting for a diagnosis before offering support (Rutherford et al., 2016). Furthermore, pupils also experienced illegal unofficial exclusions, commonly used to exclude autistic children from school (Ambitious about Autism, 2016; Atkinson, 2013; Brede et al., 2017; Watling, 2004). these were sometimes challenged by parents in this study.

The fragmented education pupils experienced has also been highlighted in previous research which discusses the long delays in accessing AP and significant periods of time spent out of school (Brede et al., 2017; Sproston et al., 2017). This fragmented education was further compounded by the lack of appropriate provision,

also highlighted by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (NAS, 2017). APs should not be a last resort after a string of unsuccessful attempts in inappropriate environments. We need to create educational environments which are suitable for autistic learners as APs are mostly not set up for the needs of autistic pupils. Provision two is a unique provision with its autism accreditation and a high percentage of autistic children, but this only accommodates for a small number of autistic pupils in the county, who must have an EHCP. Furthermore, although the pupils in this study are now attending APs, local authority professionals referred to pupils who continue to be out of education following an exclusion, meaning that many autistic pupils are not receiving their right to education.

In a similar way to the parents in the research conducted by Brede et al. (2017), parents in this study felt repeatedly let down by the system. They discussed their difficulties with professional involvement, pressure from attendance officers to make their child attend school and the legal battles they faced to secure appropriate education. Parents felt incredibly upset and disappointed that the education system had failed their children; some fought the system through tribunals while others felt helpless. Local authority professionals provided some insight into the lack of consistent professional involvement as a result of the county's allocation model and capacity. While some parents noted key professionals that supported through the process, local authority professionals explained they had, on occasion, supported pupils consistently through an exclusion although this was not within the remit of their role.

This study strongly reiterated the negative impact of exclusion on pupils, and their families, highlighted by previous research (Brede et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2006; Sproston et al., 2017). There was a clear emotional impact on children leading to further mental health needs, behaviour, social isolation and difficulties reengaging in

education. The exclusion also put a strain on family life; some parents had resigned from their job to support their child and others felt their family life was taken over by the situation. Some pupils remained unclear regarding the reason for their exclusion which caused additional anxiety. Furthermore, the negative educational experiences were so bad for some of these pupils that they and their parents highlighted a sense of relief when they were finally excluded, which further highlighted the extent of the difficulties in mainstream school.

Whilst the skills of the receiving school were seen to act as a mediating factor in the impact of the exclusion by all participant groups, there was less agreement on the type of exclusion. The promotion in legislation of managed moves, as a positive way forward, was accepted by local authority professionals but rejected by parents who clearly stated they had the same negative consequences and that pupils still felt a sense of rejection (DCSF, 2008). Previous research has acknowledged for managed moves to be successful there needs to be a high level of support, full parental engagement and the child's needs must be kept at the centre. However, there are no official records or regulations to ensure these factors during the process (Parsons, 2009).

5.6. Research Question 4: What do professionals do to support the inclusion of young autistic people in mainstream school?

Local authority professionals work across systems, often acting as a mediator, to facilitate the inclusion of autistic pupils. However, their lack of staff capacity means that support is limited and often help comes too late, at the point of crisis.

Local authority professionals play a key role in providing an understanding of autism, encouraging schools to take responsibility for their autistic pupils and suggest reasonable adjustments based on individual need. They recognised their unique role working across systems, facilitating communication and relationships between the

home, school and family to ensure positive professional relationships are built and to offer advocacy for parents and pupils (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). While local authority professionals provided an overview of their work supporting the inclusion of children on the autism spectrum in mainstream schools, much of the work was limited due to lack of capacity and a heavy focus on statutory work. They recognised the need to build positive relationships and understand individual pupils and felt more time was needed with the young people themselves and to ensure schools are implementing recommendations effectively. Indeed, two professionals spoke about previous group work they had done with parents which they were no longer able to do due to lack of staffing. Local authority professionals recognised that a more preventative approach was required to ensure the successful inclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum but felt a lack of capacity prevented this type of work.

Furthermore, schools' response to support was identified as a challenge by professionals, and some schools were felt to be unsuccessful in implementing advice offered. Lack of capacity meant the local authority professionals struggled to ensure recommendations were put in place. Additionally, while county-wide autism training was offered by professionals, this was dependent on schools' decision whether to complete the training. This highlighted the lack of accountability and responsibility to ensure the successful inclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum highlighted by the APPGA (NAS, 2017). Additionally, local authority professionals identified the difficulty of not being informed of pupils who were at risk of exclusion. This may result from an interaction between the two systems; school not highlighting pupils at risk of exclusion but also local authority professionals not making schools aware these pupils should be flagged as a priority. This may also result from lack of staff capacity as schools may not see preventative work as part of the professionals' role.

5.7. Research Question 5: What are the features of alternative provision that enable pupils on the autism spectrum?

To explore the exclusion experiences fully, this study looked at aspects of alternative provision that appeared to be working well for pupils on the autism spectrum. Parents and pupils were overwhelmingly positive about their children's current experiences and felt the APs had provided their children with educational opportunities and a future. Features of the provision were highlighted as successful for young people on the autism spectrum. However, there were some concerns raised about the pupils' future after the provision. Additionally, there were discrepancies between provision one and provision two, which raised the question of the suitability of APs for autistic pupils.

Consistent with previous research, a positive and inclusive school ethos in both provisions and an understanding of autism in provision two were recognised as positive aspects of the AP (Brede et al., 2017). The inclusive nature was recognised at whole school level which has been identified as crucial for inclusive practice (Dillon et al., 2016). The following features within the AP were recognised as effective for pupils on the autism spectrum. First, clear structures set within the school allowed for pupils' knowledge of the day ahead and minimised unstructured time, recognised as difficult for pupils on the autism spectrum. This included break times and unstructured study periods (Bauminger & Shulman, 2003). Second, personalised timetables and high pupil-staff ratios offered pupils an individualised approach and incorporated choice and flexibility into their lessons. This was also identified in previous research (Brede et al., 2017; Sproston et al., 2017). This was beneficial to pupils as it allowed pupils to build close relationships with teachers, reduced distraction from peers and enabled pupils to get instant support. Furthermore, transitions were also supported and like previous research gradual transitions were deemed as a success for pupils (Brede et al., 2017). Finally, having high aspirations was identified as a positive aspect of AP recognised by

parents as developing within the provision. However, a pupil and his parent in provision one raised concerns that he was not being academically stretched as much as in mainstream schools – an issue also raised in previous research (Brede et al., 2017). High aspirations are identified as “crucial to success” for pupils with SEN (Charman et al., 2011; DfE & DoH, 2015). Provision two may promote higher aspirations as pupils attend full-time and are expected to remain throughout statutory school age. In comparison, provision one is attended by pupils part-time, is seen as a stepping stone for many pupils and was recognised by one of the teachers as offering less choice of subjects.

An individualised approach was vital for the success of autistic learners in this study as autism manifests differently for different people and those on the autism spectrum are not a homogenous group (Brede et al., 2017; Parsons et al., 2011; Sproston et al., 2017). APs took steps to understand the individual and were mindful of their previous educational experiences. Following this understanding, individualised learning experiences were offered, with adaptations to the physical environment, teaching styles and teacher responses to behaviour. Staff regularly reviewed their individual approach and adapted these based on pupil response. The presentation of behaviour was often met with positive learning experiences or supports for pupils rather than punishments, this was vital as flexibility could, in response, promote pupils’ emotional wellbeing and stop pupils feeling judged, misunderstood and anxious (Brede et al., 2017). Staff in provision two recognised the importance of understanding autism but avoided the use of autism stereotypes and moved away from applying blanket approaches, previously recognised as an inappropriate approach to support (Dillon et al., 2016; Tobias, 2009). This fits well with the needs-based perspective of inclusion, which argues that one must be mindful of the distinct needs of pupils (Ravet, 2011).

Parents were extremely grateful that the staff members had taken the time to get to know their children and responded to them on an individual basis. Finally, APs recognised the need to support both social needs and mental health needs. Both provisions had supports in place for managing these issues. However, one teacher highlighted gaps in knowledge on supporting the mental health of these children. This is expected given that some pupils showed extreme mental health needs, but also highlighted the issue that APs may not have the skills, knowledge and expertise to deal with the mental health of pupils.

Adopting a collaborative approach and building relationships were also successful aspects of the APs identified in this study. These provisions recognised the need for input from external professionals. They also shared good practice with other professionals and provision one offered an outreach service to other schools. The provisions also recognised the need to support pupils needs beyond school, working with parents to tackle some challenges pupils faced at home. Provisions made joint decisions with pupils, parents, school staff and external professionals. There was constant contact with the parents, and provisions made extensive efforts to ensure parents felt valued, listened to and trusted in them. This regular communication contrasted with a study by Sproston et al. (2017) which reported a lack of communication between parents and alternative provision, and therefore a lack of relationship. The availability and dedication of staff in this research alongside the positive characteristics of teachers resulted in strong relationships between pupils and their teachers, recognised as vital in previous research (Scuitto et al., 2012; Sproston et al., 2017; Williams & Hanke, 2010).

The uncertainty of children's futures was raised as a concern by all groups. While some supports were in place to prepare pupils for future life after the provision,

it was recognised that more needed to be done as the level of support available was expected to reduce. This is particularly relevant given the changes in recent legislation which have extended the support for individuals with SEN up to the age of 25 and the requirements for EPs to support the transition into further education or apprenticeships (DfE, 2014).

Like Brede et al. (2017), this study found some pupils did not want to think about the future after the provision and others were very worried. Parents in provision two were keen for their children to stay in the provision for sixth form but this was based on an individual and financial decision. The length of time left in the provision was also causing anxiety for some pupils, who were unsure how long they would remain. While pupils in provision two were expected to continue throughout statutory school age, provision one aimed to be a stepping-stone back into mainstream. For one pupil who had attempted reintegration and been unsuccessful, there was no clear answer about how long he would remain in the provision, which caused him anxiety. However, both parents and teachers recognised that the pupils' experiences in the provision had provided them with the skills for a better future.

While many positive features were highlighted in the APs for pupils on the autism spectrum, it is important to note that provision two was unique in that it had autism accreditation and the majority of the pupils were on the autism spectrum. The concerns raised in provision one surrounding lack of aspirations and negative influence of peer groups have been highlighted in previous research and may reflect more broadly the experience of alternative provision (Brede et al., 2017; Sproston et al., 2017). This raises concerns about the suitability of APs for autistic pupils. It is important that positive aspects identified in this study are used to inform mainstream schools as well as other APs. It is vital that both are able to successfully cater for the distinct needs of

pupils on the autism spectrum. EPs can support mainstream schools and APs to mirror successful aspects of the APs recognised in this study to ensure the inclusion of autistic pupils.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Conclusions

Despite variation in individual characteristics, all pupils in this study reported overwhelming negative accounts of school exclusion experiences. Pupils faced significant periods of time out of education while their parents attempted to navigate the complex systems. While local authority professionals attempt to support the inclusion of autistic pupils, the schools' response and their lack of capacity hinder this process. This study found aspects of APs that work well for pupils on the autism spectrum and could be promoted in mainstream schools and other APs. It is unacceptable that so many pupils are experiencing such negative educational experiences which are having detrimental consequences on their quality of life and emotional wellbeing, and denying them the right to education.

6.2. Strengths

The use of a multi-informant approach was a strength of this research as it allowed for child-, school- and system- level factors to be examined to understand the school exclusion experiences more fully, and overcame the limitations of existing research (Brede et al., 2017; Sproston et al., 2017). Including local authority professionals allowed for insight into the lives of other pupils excluded from school so the findings were not based solely on the experiences of the twelve pupil participants but also reflected the experiences of autistic children more broadly across one local authority. Additionally, the inclusion of local authority professionals meant contextual factors could be highlighted to explain some of the exclusion experiences, for example, lack of staff capacity may explain the difficulties parents had with professional involvement. Local authority professionals also offered explanations about pupils' behaviour using

their knowledge of autism. Furthermore, including parents supplemented pupil voice in this study and allowed for a deeper understanding of their children's exclusion experiences as parents were able to reflect on how the pupils felt and the impact of the exclusion more broadly. Parents also provided a unique insight into how they experienced the processes surrounding exclusion. Finally, including pupil voice provided a unique insight into their experiences and highlighted aspects not recognised by the other respondent groups, for example, pupils' desire for friendships. Including pupil voice allowed the triangulation of data between pupil, parent and school to ensure that aspects of the provision which were highlighted positively by teachers and parents were being experienced positively by pupils.

Another key strength in this study was the attention towards autistic pupils' needs. The research met with most pupils prior to the interviews and regularly spoke to the key contact at the school about pupil needs so appropriate adaptations could be made during the interview. The researcher mainly interviewed all pupils before their parents to ensure their unique perspective was gained before it was put into context by the parents. The researcher also used inclusive methodological approaches due to their strengths outlined in Chapter 3. The Life Grid was an effective tool and removed the social demands of face to face interviews, helped recall memories and provided a structure to the conversation. The Drawing the Ideal School technique was enjoyed by some pupils but some did not wish to complete the drawing element of the task, however they could opt out of this. These considerations made it possible for all pupils to be interviewed alone which allowed them to feel comfortable to confidentially disclose any information about their experiences.

6.3. Limitations

This study is not without its limitations. First, this study included a child with no formal diagnosis of autism. However, this child did score above the cut-off score of 15 on the SCQ and was recognised as showing autistic features by both professionals and his parents. In addition, despite the high prevalence rate of pupils on the autism spectrum being excluded from school it was hard to gain access to this group and the researcher felt the absence of a formal diagnosis should not be a reason for exclusion from the study.

Second, this study did not use a comparison group so some of the findings may also relate to children who are not on the autism spectrum who have experienced school exclusion. However, where possible this study highlighted the findings in relation to the distinct needs of pupils on the autism spectrum to ensure a needs-based perspective was adopted. Additionally, if aspects of this study relate to children who are not on the autism spectrum they also need to be addressed for other children experiencing negative educational experiences and exclusion.

Finally, this study included only 12 autistic children and focused on only two provisions within one local authority. Caution is therefore warranted regarding the generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, the negative exclusion experiences reported herein have also been evidenced in previous research in different parts of the country (Brede et al., 2017; Sproston et al., 2017), increasing the confidence in the results and their generalisability.

6.4. Further research

As there is only a small research base which has investigated the school exclusion experiences of pupils on the autism spectrum, more research still needs to be conducted

in this area. Future research could use a comparison group to recognise exclusion experiences that are specific to pupils on the autism spectrum compared with other groups of young people being excluded from school. Furthermore, future research could compare the different support and processes offered for pupils experiencing different types of exclusions, investigate the support offered to pupils still out of education, or explore the experiences of autistic pupils who are excluded from primary school. Finally, research should be conducted to investigate ways to prevent exclusion, for example examining how pupils at risk of exclusion are identified and working with them, their school and their families to avoid exclusion.

6.5. Implications and recommendations

6.5.1. Implications and recommendations for Educational Psychologists

This research has important implications for EPs as it identifies the need for a more preventative approach to tackle the high prevalence rates of school exclusion for autistic pupils. It also highlights the issue of schools' response to support, the lack of a consistent professional involvement for pupils excluded from school and the need to support transition out of APs. However, while EPs are in a unique position to tackle some of these issues, the lack of funding and capacity limits the current level of support available.

EPs highlighted the need to work in a more preventative way to support the inclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum in mainstream schools. They could ensure the aspects highlighted as challenges for autistic pupils are recognised and overcome by supporting schools to make adjustments based on factors identified as successful for these pupils – essentially, to 'catch them before they fall'. EPs can act as a mediator between systems to promote the inclusion of these pupils by developing the home-

school partnerships and links with other agencies. To overcome the challenges of schools' responses (or lack thereof), EPs could also ensure schools understand how to implement recommendations and conduct regular reviews of strategies offered.

Furthermore, given the extremely negative educational experiences reported, the disproportionately high rates of exclusion and the impact of this on the pupils' wellbeing, EPs should enhance their role to prioritise this vulnerable group of pupils. Despite recent government legislation which advises schools to investigate and support any underlying mental health need behind behaviour, and identify less severe problems at an earlier stage, this research highlights the lack of support for the mental health needs of these pupils within mainstream schools (DfE, 2016). EPs can support through the development of a psychosocial curriculum, which would support pupils social and emotional development, and the use of therapeutic approaches to support pupils in managing their emotions. Educational Psychologists have been placed at the forefront of delivery of these interventions due to their unique position between mental health and education (Atkinson, Squires, Bragg, Wasilewski & Muscutt, 2013; Mackay, 2007; Squires, 2010). Small groups to support emotional wellbeing of pupils on the autism spectrum in schools using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) have proved effective in reducing anxiety levels and increase the use of problem solving coping strategies (Clarke et al., 2017). EPs can also equip school staff to recognise early signs of mental health difficulties and deliver interventions based on CBT principles to autistic children with less severe mental health needs to promote psychosocial education at an earlier stage. This may reduce some of the stress experienced by these pupils, as well as their families, as they are provided with the tools to manage their emotional and social needs.

EPs can also enhance their role by supporting pupils during the exclusion process. EPs should communicate to schools about the importance of highlighting

autistic pupils at risk of exclusion and where an exclusion takes place, EPs could act as a consistent professional to support the pupil and their family. This may require some flexibility in services operating in school allocation or traded models but is certainly possible. EPs are well placed to support these families through an exclusion, irrespective of type, as they work across systems and understand the impact these experiences can have on a young person and their family. EPs can act as the mediator between systems by encouraging and facilitating home-school partnerships to support effective joint working across systems at the time of an exclusion.

A final recommendation for EPs is the development of support for autistic pupils transitioning from schools or provisions into college and preparation for adulthood; requirements of EPs highlighted in the Children and Families Act (DfE, 2014). As future uncertainty was a key theme highlighted, EPs could better support transitions over longer timeframes, including transitioning into a college or apprenticeship after AP. This is presently a very underdeveloped area of the EP role but vital to support these pupils effectively. It has been argued that EPs are in the best position to offer transition support to further education (Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

6.5.2. Implications for the researcher's own practice

As the researcher is a trainee EP the completion of this research had direct implications on the researcher's own developing practice. Firstly, the success of using inclusive methodological approaches to gain the young peoples' perspectives has informed the researcher's own practice when gaining pupil voice. The researcher has recognised the effectiveness of using inclusive methods flexibly to overcome some of the challenges faced by autistic people and provide them with the opportunity to share their perspectives. Secondly, the researcher has recognised the importance of consultation

for exploring the inclusive aspects of educational environments highlighted in this study, including the flexibility regarding homework and school rules, as well as how schools manage the social and mental health needs of their pupils. Finally, the researcher utilised supervision to support with the emotional impact of practice. It was upsetting for the researcher to hear the narratives of these vulnerable young people who had experienced significant mental health needs and negative school experiences. The researcher realises the importance of supervision in EP practice for providing an effective outlet to manage the emotional impact of practice.

6.5.3. Recommendations for schools

The following recommendations are highlighted as a result of the findings in this study and can be applied to both mainstream schools and alternative provision to ensure they are accommodating for the distinct needs of autistic pupils. These recommendations fit well with the Good Practice in Autism Education Report which schools can also use to inform positive inclusive practice (Charman et al., 2011).

School staff should:

- Embed a positive inclusive ethos within the school from a top-down approach
- Undertake autism training to understand the distinct needs of autistic pupils
- Have high aspirations for all pupils
- Adopt a collaborative approach, with advice taken from professionals, joint working and regular contact with parents
- Highlight pupils at risk of exclusion to Educational Psychologists or other suitable professionals
- Follow the correct procedures for exclusions to stop unofficial exclusions
- Offer support to pupils and parents during an exclusion
- Develop clear transition plans for every child excluded

- Develop a good understanding of the individual needs of each autistic pupil
- Be mindful of the previous educational experiences of pupils and the effect this may have on their current engagement with education
- Make reasonable adjustments based on individual need to the environment, curriculum and teaching styles
- Incorporate clear structure into break times and study periods
- Adapt homework and consider ways to incorporate time in the pupils' school day to complete homework
- Explicitly explain the purpose of school rules to pupils
- Have flexible response to pupils' behaviour, viewing difficulties with behaviour as opportunities for learning
- Develop individual transition plans to support transitions into school
- Make links with colleges and employers to ensure pupils are supported with transitioning into further education or the workplace
- Deliver a psychosocial curriculum to support social and emotional learning
- Support individual social needs and be mindful of the increased vulnerability to social isolation and bullying autistic pupils face
- Provide support for pupils' mental health needs, helping students to manage their emotions and develop coping strategies for anxiety
- Seek advice from external professionals for mental health needs requiring support beyond staff members' capabilities
- Build positive relationships with students and develop a mentoring system

6.5.4. Recommendations for policy makers

The findings from this research, along with other publications (NAS, 2017), highlight the importance of inclusive practices for autistic pupils to be implemented through a

top-down approach with the government introducing policies to ensure pupils on the autism spectrum receive not only their right to education but also positive learning experiences adapted to their unique needs. These publications should include accountability and responsibility so the lack of schools' response highlighted in this research is avoided. Alongside this, the limited staff capacity recognised in this area, means that local authority professionals face challenges completing preventative work which supports the inclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum and those at risk of exclusion. Policy makers should consider how funding is used to support inclusion and increase the funding to train more Educational Psychologists and other professionals to enable this type of work. Increased funding at a preventative level may stop the number of students needing to attend expensive APs. Furthermore, all local authorities need appropriate provisions which accommodate for pupils on the autism spectrum, including those without a learning difficulty.

For pupils where exclusion has been unavoidable, policy makers need to ensure APs also accommodate for the distinct needs of pupils on the autism spectrum. There also needs to be further support for parents during the process of exclusion so these difficult experiences are managed with professional support and pupils receive support whilst they are out of school. Policy makers need to further investigate the unofficial exclusions experienced by pupils on the autism spectrum and hold schools accountable for these illegal practices.

Currently, autistic pupils are experiencing very negative school exclusion experiences which are having detrimental consequences on their emotional wellbeing. Recommendations must be implemented at each level to ensure the successful inclusion of autistic pupils.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Literature Search

A comprehensive literature search was conducted by searching the following databases: SCOPUS, PSYINFO, British Education Index, ERIC and library catalogues from the Institute of Education. Key words used in the search included ASC, ASD, autism, Asperger, autistic, exclusion, Pupil Referral Unit, PRU, alternative provision, AP, managed move, school experience and educational experience. The research used the following inclusion criteria:

- (1) Studies conducted in the UK so they are relevant to the UK education system referred to in this study
- (2) Studies including the perspectives of young people on the autistic spectrum, their parents and their teachers so they are relevant to the multi-informant approach used in this study



Understanding autistic children's school experiences

My name is Laura Gray and I am currently a Year 2 Trainee on the 3 year Doctoral Course of Child and Adolescent Educational Psychology at UCL Institute of Education.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project on the exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum from mainstream schools. This research is being overseen by Vivian Hill and Professor Liz Pellicano at UCL Institute of Education and forms part of my professional qualification.

Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what your participation will involve.

What is the purpose of this study?

Research shows that pupils on the autism spectrum experience alarmingly high rates of exclusions from mainstream schools. This study aims to examine young autistic people's experiences of exclusion *from their perspective* alongside the perspective of their parents, their teachers and other professionals.

We hope that the information can be used by Educational Psychologists and schools to gain an understanding of the impact of exclusion on these pupils and provide information about how mainstream provisions can accommodate for the needs of these pupils.

Why have I been invited to take part?

I am inviting pupils with a diagnosis of autism who have been permanently excluded or undergone a 'managed move' from a mainstream school to an alternative provision, their parents and their teachers to take part in this research. I am asking your permission to invite parents, pupils and teachers from your provision.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part. If you agree to take part and then change your mind, you will be able to withdraw from the study at any time – without affecting any of the participants' access to services in any way.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. I will then arrange a convenient time to come into the school to meet with pupils, parents and teachers. I will ask parents to take part in an interview as well as fill out some questionnaires about their child's behaviour and school history. I will also ask teachers to take part in an interview to discuss the pupil's current provision.

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I will also invite pupils to meet with me on two occasions. The first session will involve the pupils' completing a questionnaire about their quality of life and a test of their reasoning skills. The second session will involve an interview with two drawing activities to elicit the pupils' views on their exclusion and educational experiences.

The interviews will take approximately 30 minutes and will be recorded, subject to the participants' permission. All recordings of data on audio-equipment will be deleted after transcription. All participants are free to stop at any time during the interview and to have research data/information relating to them withdrawn without giving any reason.

Will information collected be kept confidential?

All questionnaire responses and interview recordings are regarded as strictly confidential and will be held securely until the research is finished. All data for analysis will be anonymised. In reporting on the research findings, I will not reveal the names of any participants or schools.

The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews and held on password-locked computer files. No data will be accessed by anyone other than the researchers. No data will be able to be linked back to any individual taking part in the interview.

What will happen to the results of the study?

I will produce a final report summarising the main findings of my study. We also hope to make the findings available to researchers, in the form of an academic journal article, and to practitioners.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for your consideration in taking part in this research study

Please put a circle round your answers and sign your name on this form to let us know if you are happy to participate in this study.

1. I am happy to take part in the following research project.	Yes	No
2. I understand that information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.	Yes	No
3. I have read and understood the information sheet provided.	Yes	No
4. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent from the study at any time.	Yes	No
5. I understand I can contact Laura Gray, Vivian Hill or Liz Pellicano if I have any concerns.	Yes	No

Name of provision:

Name:

Signature: **Date:**

Contact details:

Phone number:

Email:

Appendix C. Pupil information sheet and consent form

Institute of Education



What is school like for you?

My name is Laura Gray and I am doing some research in your school. I want to interview pupils who have moved from a different school to this school about their experiences.

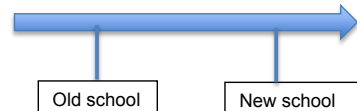


Taking part

I would like to invite you to take part in my research. If you want to take part I will come and visit you at school twice – about 30 minutes each time.

When I visit you I will ask you to do some fun activities and I'll also ask you some questions, like these:

- What was your old school like?
- How did you feel about leaving your old school?
- What is your new school like?



You do not have to take part. If you choose to take part and then change your mind later you will be able to stop taking part at any time.

Information shared

I will not tell anyone else the things you tell me unless you tell me something which I think means you or someone else is unsafe. When I write about this research I will call you by a different name so no-one will know what you have said. All the information you tell me will be kept on the computer with a password that only I know.

If you have any questions or would like to know more, you can email me at laura.gray.15@ucl.ac.uk

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What is school like for you?

Please put a circle round your answers



1. I am happy to take part in the research.	Yes	No
2. I am happy to be audio recorded for this research.	Yes	No
3. I understand that all the things I say will not be shared.	Yes	No
4. I have read and understood the information sheet provided.	Yes	No
5. I understand that I can stop taking part at any time.	Yes	No
6. I understand I can contact Laura Gray if I need more information.	Yes	No

Name of school:

Name:

Signature:**Date:**

Appendix D. Parent information sheet and consent form

Institute of Education



Understanding your child's school experiences

My name is Laura Gray and I am currently a Year 2 Trainee on the 3 year Doctoral Course of Child and Adolescent Educational Psychology at UCL Institute of Education.

I would like to invite you and your son/daughter to participate in my research project on the exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum from mainstream schools. This research is being overseen by Vivian Hill and Professor Liz Pellicano at UCL Institute of Education and forms part of my professional qualification.

Before you decide whether you would like for you and your child to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what your participation and your son's/daughter's participation will involve.

What is the purpose of this study?

Research shows that pupils on the autism spectrum experience alarmingly high rates of exclusions from mainstream schools. This study aims to examine young autistic people's experiences of exclusion *from their perspective* alongside the perspective of their parents, their teachers and other professionals. We are therefore keen to understand your child's views.

We hope that the information can be used by Educational Psychologists and schools to gain an understanding of the impact of exclusion on these pupils and provide information about how mainstream provisions can accommodate for the needs of these pupils.

Why have I been invited to take part?

I am inviting pupils with a diagnosis of autism who have been permanently excluded or undergone a 'managed move' from a mainstream school to an alternative provision, their parents and their teachers to take part in this research. Permission to invite parents and pupils from your son/daughter's current provision has been sought and agreed from the Head Teacher prior to seeking permission from yourself.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary. You and your son/daughter do not have to take part. Should you give permission for your child to take part, and then change your mind, you will have the right to withdraw your child from the study at any time – without affecting you or your child's access to services in any way.

What will happen if myself and my son/daughter agree to they take part?

If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form for yourself and your son/daughter. I will then arrange a convenient time to come into the school to meet with you. I will ask you to take part in an interview as well as fill out some questionnaires about your child's behaviour and school history. In the interview you will be asked about your son/daughter's experience of school exclusion and their experiences in

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their previous school and current provision.

I will also invite your son/daughter to meet with me on two occasions. The first session will involve your child completing a questionnaire about their quality of life and a test of their reasoning skills. The second session will involve an interview with two drawing activities to gain a sense of your son's/daughter's views on their exclusion and educational experiences.

The interviews will take approximately 30 minutes and will be recorded, subject to you and your son's/daughter's permission. All recordings of data on audio-equipment will be deleted after transcription. Even if you have given permission for yourself and your son/daughter to take part, you are still free to stop their participation at any time during the interview and to have research data/information relating to you or your son/daughter withdrawn without giving any reason.

Will information collected be kept confidential?

All questionnaire responses and interview recordings are regarded as strictly confidential and will be held securely until the research is finished. All data for analysis will be anonymised. In reporting on the research findings, I will not reveal the names of any participants or schools. At all times there will be no possibility of you as individuals being linked with the data.

The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews and held on password-locked computer files. No data will be accessed by anyone other than the researchers. No data will be able to be linked back to any individual taking part in the interview.

What will happen to the results of the study?

I will produce a final report summarising the main findings of my study. We also hope to make the findings available to researchers, in the form of an academic journal article, and to practitioners.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for your consideration in taking part in this research study

Please put a circle round your answers and sign your name on this form to let us know if you are happy for us to use information about you from official records in our research.

1. I am happy for my son/daughter to take part in the following research project within their current educational provision.	Yes	No
2. I am happy for my son/daughter to be audio recorded for this research.	Yes	No
3. I understand that information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.	Yes	No
4. I have read and understood the information sheet provided.	Yes	No
5. I understand that I am free to withdraw my son/daughter's consent from the study at any time, without affecting his/access to services in any way.	Yes	No
6. I understand I can contact Laura Gray, Vivian Hill or Liz Pellicano if I have any concerns.	Yes	No



Understanding your child's school experiences – Parent consent form

Please put a circle round your answers and sign your name on this form to let us know if you are happy for us to use information about you from official records in our research.

1. I am happy to take part in the following research project within my son/daughter's current educational provision.	Yes	No
2. I am happy to be audio recorded for this research.	Yes	No
3. I understand that information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.	Yes	No
4. I have read and understood the information sheet provided.	Yes	No
5. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent from the study at any time, without affecting my access to services in any way.	Yes	No
6. I understand I can contact Laura Gray, Vivian Hill or Liz Pellicano if I have any concerns.	Yes	No

Name of provision:

Name of child:

Relationship to child:

Name:

Signature: Date:

Contact details:

Phone number:

Email:

Appendix E. Teacher information sheet and consent form

Institute of Education



Understanding autistic children's school experiences

My name is Laura Gray and I am currently a Year 2 Trainee on the 3 year Doctoral Course of Child and Adolescent Educational Psychology at UCL Institute of Education.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project on the exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum from mainstream schools. This research is being overseen by Vivian Hill and Professor Liz Pellicano at UCL Institute of Education and forms part of my professional qualification.

Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what your participation will involve.

What is the purpose of this study?

Research shows that pupils on the autism spectrum experience alarmingly high rates of exclusions from mainstream schools. This study aims to examine young autistic people's experiences of exclusion *from their perspective* alongside the perspective of their parents, their teachers and other professionals. As the teacher of a child on the autism spectrum, we are therefore keen to understand your views.

We hope that the information can be used by Educational Psychologists and schools to gain an understanding of the impact of exclusion on these pupils and provide information about how mainstream provisions can accommodate for the needs of these pupils.

Why have I been invited to take part?

I am inviting pupils with a diagnosis of autism who have been permanently excluded or undergone a 'managed move' from a mainstream school to an alternative provision, their parents and their teachers to take part in this research. Permission to invite teachers has been sought and agreed from the Head Teacher prior to seeking permission from yourself.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary. You not have to take part. If you agree to take part and then change your mind, you will be able to withdraw from the study at any time.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. I will then arrange a convenient time to come into the school to meet with you. I will ask you to take part in an interview. In the interview you will be asked about the pupil's school experiences.

The interviews will take approximately 30 minutes and will be recorded, subject to your

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permission. All recordings of data on audio-equipment will be deleted after transcription. Even if you have given permission to take part, you are still free to stop your participation at any time during the interview and to have research data/information relating to you withdrawn without giving any reason.

Will information collected be kept confidential?

All interview recordings are regarded as strictly confidential and will be held securely until the research is finished. All data for analysis will be anonymised. In reporting on the research findings, I will not reveal the names of any participants or schools. At all times there will be no possibility of you as an individual being linked with the data.

The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews and held on password-locked computer files. No data will be accessed by anyone other than the researchers. No data will be able to be linked back to any individual taking part in the interview.

What will happen to the results of the study?

I will produce a final report summarising the main findings of my study. We also hope to make the findings available to researchers, in the form of an academic journal article, and to practitioners.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for your consideration in taking part in this research study

Please put a circle round your answers and sign your name on this form to let us know if you are happy for us to use information about you from official records in our research.

1. I am happy to take part in the following research project within the educational provision I work in.	Yes	No
2. I am happy to be audio recorded for this research.	Yes	No
3. I understand that information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.	Yes	No
4. I have read and understood the information sheet provided.	Yes	No
5. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent from the study at any time.	Yes	No
6. I understand I can contact Laura Gray, Vivian Hill or Liz Pellicano if I have any concerns.	Yes	No

Name of provision:

Name of child you teach:

Job Title:

Name:

Signature: Date:

Contact details:

Phone number:

Email:

Appendix F. Local authority professional information sheet and consent form

Institute of Education



Understanding autistic children's school experiences

My name is Laura Gray and I am currently a Year 2 Trainee on the 3 year Doctoral Course of Child and Adolescent Educational Psychology at UCL Institute of Education.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project on the exclusion of pupils on the autism spectrum from mainstream schools. This research is being overseen by Vivian Hill and Professor Liz Pellicano at UCL Institute of Education and forms part of my professional qualification.

Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what your participation will involve.

What is the purpose of this study?

Research shows that pupils on the autism spectrum experience alarmingly high rates of exclusions from mainstream schools. This study aims to examine young autistic people's experiences of exclusion *from their perspective* alongside the perspective of their parents, their teachers and other professionals. As a professional working with students on the autism spectrum, we are therefore keen to understand your views.

We hope that the information can be used by Educational Psychologists and schools to gain an understanding of the impact of exclusion on these pupils and provide information about how mainstream provisions can accommodate for the needs of these pupils.

Why have I been invited to take part?

I am inviting Educational Psychologists and local authority professionals to share their experiences of working with autistic pupils who have been permanently excluded or undergone a 'managed move' from a mainstream school to an alternative provision.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part. If you agree to take part and then change your mind, you will be able to withdraw from the study at any time.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. I will then arrange a convenient time to meet with you. I will ask you to take part in an interview to talk about your experience of supporting autistic pupils who have experienced an exclusion or undergone a 'managed move' to an alternative provision.

The interviews will take approximately 30 minutes and will be recorded, subject to your permission. All recordings of data on audio-equipment will be deleted after transcription. Even

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if you have given permission to take part, you are still free to stop their participation at any time during the interview and to have research data/information relating to you withdrawn without giving any reason.

Will information collected be kept confidential?

All interview recordings are regarded as strictly confidential and will be held securely until the research is finished. All data for analysis will be anonymised. In reporting on the research findings, I will not reveal the names of any participants or schools. At all times there will be no possibility of you as an individual being linked with the data.

The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews and held on password-locked computer files. No data will be accessed by anyone other than the researchers. No data will be able to be linked back to any individual taking part in the interview.

What will happen to the results of the study?

I will produce a final report summarising the main findings of my study. We also hope to make the findings available to researchers, in the form of an academic journal article, and to practitioners.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for your consideration in taking part in this research study

Please put a circle round your answers and sign your name on this form to let us know if you are happy to participate in this study.

1. I am happy to take part in the following research project.	Yes	No
2. I understand that information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.	Yes	No
3. I have read and understood the information sheet provided.	Yes	No
4. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent from the study at any time.	Yes	No
5. I understand I can contact Laura Gray, Vivian Hill or Liz Pellicano if I have any concerns.	Yes	No

Job title:

Name of team you work in :

Name :

Signature: Date:

Contact details:

Phone number:

Email:

Appendix G. Pupil profiles

Pupil information was gained from background questionnaires and interviews with parents and pupils. There is limited information for PU7 and PU11 as their parents chose not to take part in the study.

PU1 attended two mainstream secondary schools before moving to an alternative provision. During his first secondary school placement, he experienced multiple unofficial exclusions so his parents decided to move him to a smaller mainstream school. However, this mainstream placement also broke down as the pupil continued to receive exclusions and eventually underwent a managed move. During his time in the alternative provision staff attempted to reintegrate him back into a mainstream school. He completed a trial but unfortunately school staff felt he was unable to complete the academic work to the expected level and was asked to leave after achieving poorly in an exam. He is currently undergoing an assessment for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

PU2 had attended one mainstream secondary school where he experienced several fixed term exclusions and eventually underwent a managed move. He has left the alternative provision to attend college. He has an EHCP.

PU3 attended one mainstream secondary school and was permanently excluded as a result of, what school perceived as, behaviour difficulties. Before the exclusion the school asked the pupil's mother to keep him off school while they created a suitable learning environment, his mother reported this never happened. This pupil then spent more than a year being home educated by his mother before moving onto the alternative provision after receiving an EHCP.

PU4 was adopted at four weeks old and remains with his adoptive parents. He was permanently excluded from his mainstream primary school in Year 6 due to behavioural incidents. His adoptive mother made official complaints about the exclusion and multi-agency meetings were held where the exclusion was rescinded. However, although the exclusion was rescinded the pupil was then only able to attend school part time and was separated from peers in a room with two teaching assistants. His mother reported that the local authority made a mistake about his placement within an autism base in an out of county mainstream school; he was provided with a place within the main school rather than within the autism base. Without an appropriate school place he ended up placed in the alternative provision.

PU5 attended a mainstream secondary school but began to receive unofficial exclusions. He suffered with anxiety and eventually self-excluded at 15. PU5 was hospitalised as he began refusing to eat or drink due to anxiety. He reports that the reason he self-excluded was due to anxiety regarding homework. He received support and was eventually discharged from hospital and was well enough to return to school. However, when he returned to school, PU5 reported he was given the work he missed as homework and again he felt no longer able to attend due to anxiety surrounding this. PU5 missed two years of education before his parents secured an EHCP to support his application to provision two.

PU6 attended mainstream school until the age of 13 when he underwent a managed move. He struggled in the environment and his parent reported that they attempted to help the school support him. PU6's mother began court proceedings against the local authority but this was settled out of court. PU6 spent time out of school and his mother applied for an EHCP and involved various agencies to support him. Eventually a professional told her about provision two and she applied to get her son a place. During this time PU6 had experienced a family breakdown.

PU7 reported that she attended mainstream school in Year 7 but was hospitalised for the duration of Year 8 due to mental health needs. She reported that she then self-excluded and

remained out of school for Year 9 and most of Year 10, starting in provision two at the end of Year 10. She reported that she was only diagnosed in Year 9 with autism and has depression and emotional trauma connected to school. She continues to struggle with mental health difficulties but is managing them in provision two.

PU8 experienced unofficial exclusions in his first primary school and his mother removed him. He then attended an alternative mainstream primary where he had no exclusions. During his time in infant school his anxiety was so bad that he began stool withholding and medical problems from this remain. PU8 later attended a mainstream secondary school where he received two fixed term exclusions. Then an incident occurred where he injured another pupil, the school sought police advice and parents were told he would be unable to return whilst the other pupil involved in the incident remained in school. Parents felt they had no choice and removed him from school. Parents went to two tribunals; firstly, a discrimination hearing against the school and secondly to secure an appropriate provision for their child. PU8 has only recently begun attending provision two. PU8 was home educated while his parents sought alternative provision.

PU9 attended a mainstream school until the age of 15 but then struggled to attend due to anxiety and slowly self-excluded. His parents then attempted to get him an EHCP but their first effort got turned down. Once they secured an EHCP their request for provision two also got turned down. PU9 spent Year 9 out of school, his parents sought support for his mental health needs and he was signed off school by CAMHs due to anxiety. PU9 was then accepted at panel for provision two and spent one year transitioning into the provision. He now attends every day and does not like to miss school.

PU10 is in foster care after suffering from neglect as a child and experiencing a family trauma. He has recently been placed in foster care in the county and got moved into provision two from a different provision out of county. His foster parent reports that he experienced a permanent exclusion from his first mainstream secondary school. His foster parents are unsure about his past educational experiences as they have only known him for a couple of years. His foster carer believes his time in other provisions were not suited to his needs and described them as “babysitting”.

PU11 reported that she spent Year 7 and Year 8 in mainstream school. She suffered from significant mental health needs, was sectioned and then supported by an agency for one year, which helped pupils who are unable to attend school due to health reasons. PU11 then began attending provision two in Year 10.

PU12 attended secondary school for 18 months before self-excluding due to anxiety and his parents were told by school staff to find an alternative school. PU12 missed a whole academic year while waiting for an alternative provision after securing an EHCP. His parents were first told he was unable to attend provision two as there was a suitable mainstream school but they appealed this decision and PU12 was accepted in provision two at an SEN panel.

Appendix H. Pupil semi-structured interview schedule

Interview Schedule – Pupil

Before recording

Introduce self - Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me about your experiences in school.

Explain research to the pupil - I will ask you some questions about the schools you have been to and your move from (previous school) to (current school) and ask you to complete two activities. There are no right and wrong answers, I just want to know what you think and feel about things.

Right to withdraw – If you do not want to answer any of the questions or complete a task you won't have to and we can skip it. If you want a break at any time you can tell me or use the break card, if you want to stop you can tell me or use the stop card and we can stop the interview.

Explain confidentiality – I will not tell anyone else the things you tell me unless you tell me something which I think means you or someone else is unsafe. When I write about this research I will use a different name so no-one will know what you have said so I would like you to tell me what you really think.

Ask for permission to record – Just before we start, I was wondering whether it would be OK to tape record the interview. It is often hard to listen and write at the same time and so it is helpful to tape record the interviews I do. The tape will only be listened to by myself and other members of our research team. We will delete it when we have finished using it.

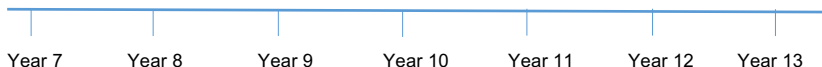
Introductions

Could you say:

- what your name is, and
- what school you go to

This is called a life grid, it's a way of helping you to talk about the different schools you have been to (show them life grid)

X's Life Grid



Year 7 Year 8 Year 9 Year 10 Year 11 Year 12 Year 13

Questions

Current school

1. How long have you been coming to this school? (draw across these ages)
2. Tell me about (current school)
 - a. What do you like about (current school)?
 - b. What do you find difficult about (current school)?
 - c. What do the teachers do to help you here?
 - d. Is there anything else you would like your teachers to help you with?

Previous school

3. What school did you go to before you came to this school (draw on life grid)
4. How long did you go to that school for?
5. Tell me about (previous school)
 - a. What did you like about (previous school)?
 - b. What did you find difficult about (previous school)?
 - c. What did the teachers do to help you in (previous school)?
 - d. Is there anything else the school could have done to help you?

Now look at the timeline

6. When were you happiest in school?
7. When did you find school the hardest?

Hopes and Aspirations

8. How long will you be in this school?
9. Where do you hope to go next?
10. What are you hoping to do when you leave school?
 - a. What might help you get where you want?
 - b. What kind of support, if any, will you need to achieve your goals in life?

Is there anything missing from your life grid, for example other schools you have been to?

Drawing the Ideal School Technique

For this next activity I will be doing the writing and you will be doing the drawing. You do not need to include lots of details and it doesn't matter if you make any mistakes

Part 1: Drawing the kind of school you would not like

The school

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper.

Tell me three things about this school. What kind of school is this?

The classroom

Think about the sort of classroom you would not like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in the school.

Draw some of the things in this classroom.

The students

Think about some of the students at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these students. What are the students doing? Tell me three things about these students?

The adults

Think about some of the adults at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about these adults.

Me

Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Tell me three things about the way you feel at this school.

Part 2: Drawing the kind of school you would like

The school

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper.

Tell me three things about this school. What kind of school is this?

The classroom

Think about the sort of classroom you would like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in the school.

Draw some of the things in this classroom.

The students

Think about some of the students at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these students. What are the students doing? Tell me three things about these students.

The adults

Think about some of the adults at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about these adults.

Me

Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of what you would be doing at this school. Tell me three things about the way you feel at this school.

Appendix I. Parent semi-structured interview schedule

Interview Schedule – Parent

Introduction: Thank you very much again for being involved in this research. As you are aware, this research is trying to understand young people's views and experiences of exclusion.

This interview will give us a chance to get to know more about YOUR views and perspectives about your son/daughter's educational experiences.

We know that some of these issues can be quite sensitive. Please be assured that your responses remain confidential and that we can stop and take a break at any time, if you need.

Just before we start, I was wondering whether it would be OK to tape record the interview. It is often hard to listen and write at the same time and so it is helpful to tape record the interviews I do. The tape will only be listened to by myself and other members of our research team. We will delete it when we have finished using it.

Introductions

Could you say:

- what your name is, and
- what your son/daughter's name is

Tell me about your child.

1. How would you describe him/her?
2. What are his/her strengths?

Current school: Tell me about your child's current school.

3. How long has your son/daughter been coming to this school?
4. How does your child feel about coming to this school? Did they have a choice about coming to this school?
5. In what ways does this school support your son/daughter?
6. Is there anything else you think the school could do to support your son/daughter?
7. Since coming to this school, has anything else in their life outside of school changed?

Previous school: Tell me about your child's previous school(s).

8. How long was your son/daughter at their previous school?
9. What was your son/daughter's experience like in their previous school?
10. What worked well in your child's previous school? What support did they receive? Was it helpful?
11. What didn't work so well in your child's previous school?

Exclusion: Tell me about what happened when your son/daughter moved from (previous school) to (current school)

12. What led to your child being moved/excluded from school?
13. What did the experience feel like for you? And what did it seem like for your son/daughter?
14. What people were involved in your child's move/exclusion?

15. Who supported you during your child's move/exclusion?
 - a. What did they do to support you?
16. How did your son/daughter's move/exclusion affect your family?
17. Do you feel the move to a new provision was successful for your son/daughter? Why/why not?
 - a. What made it successful?
 - b. What could have helped to make the move better for you?
18. How long did it take for your child to move schools/find a new school?
 - a. What impact do you think this had on you and your child?

Hope and Aspirations: Tell me about your hopes for your son/daughter future?

19. How long will your son/daughter be in this school?
20. What are your aspirations for your son/daughter?
 - a. What might help them get there?
 - b. What kind of support, if any, will they need to achieve their goals in life?
 - c. What are your son/daughter's aspirations?

That's all my questions. Are there any issues that we haven't covered that you think are important?

Appendix J. Teacher semi-structured interview schedule

Interview Schedule – Teacher

Introduction: Thank you very much again for being involved in this research. As you are aware, this research is trying to understand young people's views and experiences of exclusion.

This interview will give us a chance to get to know more about YOUR views and perspectives about the educational experiences for pupils on the autism spectrum.

We know that some of these issues can be quite sensitive. Please be assured that your responses remain confidential and that we can stop and take a break at any time, if you need.

Just before we start, I was wondering whether it would be OK to tape record the interview. It is often hard to listen and write at the same time and so it is helpful to tape record the interviews I do. The tape will only be listened to by myself and other members of our research team. We will delete it when we have finished using it.

Introductions

Could you say:

- what your name is
- what is your role, and
- how long have you worked in this role and within this setting?

Current school: To begin, could you tell me about your role in the school.

1. How long have you been working with pupil x? What are his/her strengths? What do you think s/he finds difficult or particularly challenging? Where do you think s/he needs the most support?
 - a. What was your experience working with pupil x when he/she first started at the school? (if relevant)
 - b. What is your experience working with pupil x now?
2. What do you think pupil x likes about this school?
3. What do you think pupil x finds difficult in school?
4. How do you support x?
 - a. Do you think this support can be maintained over time?
5. How does your school support pupil x?
6. Is there anything else you think the school could do to support pupil x?
7. In what ways do you work with x's parents?
 - a. How often do you make contact with x's parents?
 - b. How involved are x's parents in his/her education?
8. Is this provision seen as a temporary measure or an option for the remainder of their school career?
 - a. How is the decision made?
 - b. Was that always the plan?
 - c. Is there a plan for what happens next?
 - d. Where do you see X in the future?

Autism: To finish up, I just have some overall questions about autism.

9. How would you describe autism?
10. Are there many autistic pupils in your school?
11. How much experience have you had supporting pupils on the autism spectrum? Do you feel well-equipped to do so? How could you be better supported?
12. What do you think your school does to support the needs of pupils with autism? Should it do less? More?

That's all my questions. Are there any issues that we haven't covered that you think are important?

Appendix K. Educational Psychologist semi-structured interview schedule

Interview Schedule – EPs

Introduction: Thank you very much again for being involved in this research. As you are aware, this research is trying to understand young people's views and experiences of exclusion.

This interview will give us a chance to get to know more about YOUR views and perspectives about the educational experiences for pupils on the autism spectrum.

We know that some of these issues can be quite sensitive. Please be assured that your responses remain confidential and that we can stop and take a break at any time, if you need.

Just before we start, I was wondering whether it would be OK to tape record the interview. It is often hard to listen and write at the same time and so it is helpful to tape record the interviews I do. The tape will only be listened to by myself and other members of our research team. We will delete it when we have finished using it.

Introductions

Could you say:

- what your name is
- what is your role, and
- how long have you worked in this role and within this county?

Current role: To begin could you tell me about your role in schools.

1. In what ways do you support the inclusion of autistic pupils in mainstream schools?
2. Is there any other ways you think Educational Psychologists can support the inclusion of autistic pupils in mainstream schools?
3. What do you think the county does to support the inclusion of autistic pupils in mainstream schools?
4. Is there anything else you think the county could do to support these pupils?
5. Do you think there are any barriers for autistic pupils accessing mainstream schools?
6. Have you worked with many pupils with autism who have been excluded or managed moved from school?
7. What have been the main reasons for the exclusion or managed move of these pupils?
8. What do you think the exclusion experience has been like for the young people with autism?
9. How have you supported autistic pupils who have been excluded or managed moved?
10. How do you support autistic pupils who are at risk of exclusion?
11. Is there any other ways you think Educational Psychologists could support these pupils through the exclusion or managed move?

That's all my questions. Are there any issues that we haven't covered that you think are important?

Appendix L. Specialist Autism Teacher semi-structured interview schedule

Interview Schedule – Autism Teacher

Introduction: Thank you very much again for being involved in this research. As you are aware, this research is trying to understand young people's views and experiences of exclusion.

This interview will give us a chance to get to know more about YOUR views and perspectives about the educational experiences for pupils on the autism spectrum.

We know that some of these issues can be quite sensitive. Please be assured that your responses remain confidential and that we can stop and take a break at any time, if you need.

Just before we start, I was wondering whether it would be OK to tape record the interview. The tape will only be listened to by myself and other members of our research team. We will delete it when we have finished using it.

Introductions

Could you say:

- what your name is
- what is your role, and
- how long have you worked in this role and within this county?

Current role:

1. To begin could you tell me about your role in schools?
 - a. How much contact do you have with young people?
 - b. How much contact do you have with parents
2. Can you tell me what the term 'inclusion' means to you?
3. In what ways do you support the inclusion of autistic pupils in mainstream schools? What do you think works/doesn't work?
4. What are the barriers, if any, for autistic pupils accessing mainstream schools?
5. Are there any other ways you think the specialist teachers should support the inclusion of autistic pupils in mainstream schools?
6. What do you think the county does to support the inclusion of autistic pupils in mainstream schools? What works/doesn't work?
7. Is there anything else you think the county should do to support these pupils?
8. Have you worked with many pupils with autism who have been excluded or managed moved from school? Can you give me an example of a case (without identifying the children/parents/schools involved)?
9. What have been the main reasons for the exclusion or managed move of these pupils? At what point did you (as a specialist teacher) get involved? What could have been done in these cases to support children's *inclusion*?
10. What do you think is the impact of being excluded for young autistic people?
11. How have you supported autistic pupils who have been excluded or managed moved?
12. How do you support autistic pupils who are at risk of exclusion? What do you think has worked/has not worked?
13. Are there any other ways you think specialist teachers could support these pupils through the exclusion or managed move?

That's all my questions. Are there any issues that we haven't covered that you think are important?

Appendix M. Sample of coded interview transcript

PU4 interview	
Raw data	Initial codes
<p>PU4: Cos, first about five years, four, four or five years of primary school are good, in year 5 I was like ok, ok, then year 6, I forgot what happened, it was such a long time ago but, about two months of the beginning of the year 6 I wasn't in school, then for about one month I was in school but I was only in it for about two hours, then for the last two months I was in full</p> <p>Interviewer: What made you...?</p> <p>PU4: So really, I had a half of year 6</p> <p>Interviewer: Half of year 6, ok, so what made you come into school then, at the end of year 6?</p> <p>PU4: I found it all to be, I didn't exactly want to be out of school, I wanted to be in school but I forgot what happened, but I, my mum and I think the head teacher had a talk, I think it was after something happened with me and another student, I think we got into an argument, and that sort of escalated, so that was why I was off, cos my head teacher was trying to find out what to do with me, my mum was at home just doing this, and they had loads of meetings</p> <p>Interviewer: Yeah, ok</p> <p>PU4: Meanwhile I was in the middle of it all just trying to cope with it</p> <p>Interviewer: And how did you feel about that?</p> <p>PU4: Firstly, I felt sort of sad cos I won't be able to see my friends, it's the last year of school, it's the last time I think I probably, I probably won't see my friends at least a lot</p> <p>Interviewer: Did you choose to stay at home or did the school ask you to stay at home?</p> <p>PU4: Yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: Did the school ask you or you chose?</p>	<p>Missed two months of school in year 6</p> <p>Only allowed to attend school for two hours a day in previous mainstream</p> <p>Did not want to be out of school when attending mainstream</p> <p>Something happened with another student to cause exclusion in mainstream</p> <p>Head Teacher trying to work out what to do after pupil being asked to leave</p> <p>Meetings with head and parent about exclusion</p> <p>Pupil trying to cope with exclusion</p> <p>Pupil stuck in the middle of meetings over exclusion</p> <p>Sad about not seeing friends after exclusion</p>

<p>PU4: The school asked you</p> <p>Interviewer: OK, the school asked you and how did that make you feel when they asked you to stay at home?</p> <p>PU4: It sort of made me feel like, it sort of made me feel, like, weak, cos they, they, they were like 'oh you're not allowed to go into school anymore', sorry, even though like my mum couldn't, at that time, couldn't argue with that, argue with me that, like give her, give her examples of why, oh but he's doing this, you haven't given the necessary thing you need, they said, I have to (inaudible) having meeting after meeting with my mum and my ex head teacher about what to do</p> <p>Interviewer: And how did you find those meetings?</p> <p>PU4: Sort of, really stressful, cos like my education was on the line and my mum was really getting angry at the head teacher because she didn't really listen, she thought it was all like a joke</p>	<p>School asked pupil to stay at home</p> <p>Exclusion made pupil feel weak</p> <p>Parent had argued the school had not put necessary provision in place</p> <p>Multiple meetings with head and parent about exclusion</p> <p>Found meetings about exclusion really stressful</p> <p>Pupil felt his education was on the line</p> <p>Parent was getting angry about exclusion</p> <p>Head teacher did not listen</p>
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Appendix N. Pupil thematic map

Theme	Subtheme	Example of initial codes
School environment & ethos in mainstream	Lack of support in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would have liked more one to one support in mainstream school • Lack of help in mainstream due to class sizes • Good student to teacher ratio in mainstream school (counter quote) • Mainstream school did not give enough support for learning • Was not allowed help in English as in higher set in mainstream • Felt like needed more help to learn in mainstream • Mainstream took help away in year 10 • Teachers did not help in mainstream • Mainstream did not give support for autism • Lack of support in mainstream school • Unable to get supports for exams in mainstream school despite requests • Given staff member to support in mainstream school (counter quote) • Parent had argued the school had not put necessary provision in place
	Lack of understanding of autism in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No exceptions for behaviour in mainstream school • Don't learn about autism from books • Only one staff member trained in autism in mainstream provision • Felt they didn't get her in mainstream school • Fiddle toys previously seen as disruptive • Unknowing teachers in mainstream schools
	Physical and sensory needs in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many people in mainstream school • Found the number of people in mainstream intimidating • Impossible to filter out noise and distractions in mainstream school • Would previously get distracted by noise and mentally log out of lessons • Cry if adults raise their voice in mainstream • Classrooms too big in mainstream school • Big and busy in mainstream school
	Difficulty with school rules in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggled with teacher expectations in mainstream school • Mainstream expectation for pupil to be an example to younger pupils • Draconian with rules in mainstream school • Teachers are arbitrarily strict on some people and not others in mainstream • Stupid and unnecessary rules in mainstream • Struggled with rules in the playground in mainstream • Strict in mainstream school • Whole class punishment in non-ideal school • Struggled with joint reward system in mainstream school
	Difficulties with teaching style in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanted more structure in mainstream school • Could have set clear directions to support in mainstream • General instructions for larger classes in mainstream school • Unclear directions in mainstream schools • Struggles with the use of broad tasks in mainstream schools • Difficult to motivate self if cannot see purpose

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous school had a good education system (counter quote)
	Homework causing anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety and stress from pressures of homework • Would feel or be sick due to homework in mainstream • Unable to express anxiety around homework • Avoided school due to homework • Stressed having to complete schoolwork outside of school in mainstream • Learnt to avoid homework in mainstream • No homework in ideal school • Was not completing any homework in year 8 in mainstream • Struggles completing school work at home • Consequences of not completing homework • Home was to recuperate for the next day • Home was to rest and relax • Difficulty understanding why assigned homework • Separation of school and home essential for stress reduction
	Lack of structure in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found lunchtimes difficult in mainstream school • Small groups at lunchtime in non-ideal school
School environment & ethos in AP	High aspirations in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirations for higher education • Aspirations to go to university • Job aspirations • Knows qualifications needed for aspirations • Wants to do A-levels in future • Achieving qualifications in provision • Not doing science in current provision despite wanting to (counter quote)
	Inclusive ethos of AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision more specialised towards pupils • Current provision has different people from different backgrounds
	Flexible responses in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow more adjustments in terms of behaviour in current provision • Give more leeway in current provision • More specialised to deal with behaviour • Not forced to do things in current provision
	Flexible timetable in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance between lessons and choice in current provision • Better at GCSEs as there is some choice • Some choices in timetable in current provision • Flexible with timetable in current provision • Provision organises chosen activities
	Support in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current provision is trying their best to support student • Support in current provision is good • Does not feel current provision could do any more to help
	Understanding of autism in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More specialised to deal with behaviour • Staff in provision know more about ADHD and misbehaving • Teachers know how to deal with my needs in current provision • Very well trained teachers in current provision
	Good physical and sensory environment in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal school is like current provision • Current provision is quiet • Less people in provision • Sensory room in current provision • Can listen to music in current provision to filter out background noise

	Teacher to pupil ratio in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have more time for pupils in provision due to smaller classes • Questions answered straight away in current provision • Easier to learn in current provision due to small groups • One to one teaching in current provision • Teachers can help more due to one to one teaching in current provision • Individual teaching in current provision
	More structure in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less freedom in current provision • Less freedom helps with behaviour
	Teaching in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better lessons in current provision • Able to ask questions in current provision • Learning completed in short bursts • Adapt work if struggling in current provision • Teachers give clear direction in current provision • Support with classroom learning by explaining things nicely in current provision
	Homework in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like flexibility with homework in college • Teachers in provision help with homework • No homework in current provision
Relationships	Negative teacher characteristics in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found teachers in mainstream to be unreasonable • Teachers used to shout in mainstream school • Teachers were aggressive in mainstream • Teachers in mainstream school did not show respect to pupils • Teachers in mainstream didn't keep promises • Head Teacher did not listen • Head Teacher made pupil sit with younger year in mainstream school • Treated unfairly by staff in mainstream • Staff in mainstream always telling me off • Did not like how teachers deal with children in mainstream school • Teachers unable to control classroom in mainstream school • Teachers thought they were above pupils in previous mainstream schools
	Negative relationships in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not like pupils in mainstream school • Teachers did not interact much with students in mainstream school • Teachers had favourites in mainstream school • Liked one of the teachers in mainstream school (counter quote)
	Social exclusion in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not always fit in with peers • Do not get along with girls the same age • Excluded from conversations by other girls • Do not get on with other student in the classroom in current provision • Did not like being in the presence of other children • Finds it hard to engage in bitchy talking with other students • Did not understand people in mainstream school
	Bullying in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hardest time in education was due to bullying • Bullies in non-ideal school • Got bullied in mainstream school
	Pupils want friendships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone gets along in ideal school

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not like being home schooled as on his own as no social life • Students can talk to each other about life in ideal school • Likes social interactions • Like it when people are funny
	Friendships in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Got along with most of the kids in mainstream • Liked friend in mainstream (he has passed away) • Likes the social side of mainstream school • Liked friends in mainstream • Sad about not seeing friends after exclusion • Did not have friends in mainstream (counter quote)
	Friendships in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social in current provision • Friendships in current provision • Not interested in interacting with the other pupils in the current provision (counter quote)
	Positive relationships in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knew everyone in current provision • Could trust everyone in current provision • Call teachers by first name in current provision • Everything was fine when got to know staff at current provision • More connection between teachers and students in current provision • Want to get along with teachers in ideal school • Feels mentor has to be nice to students (counter quote) • Likes some of the teachers in current provision
	Positive teacher characteristics in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good people in current provision • Nice people in current provision • Everyone is friendly in current provision • Everyone is relaxed in current provision • Caring and fun teachers in current provision • Teachers are kind in current provision • Teacher are nice in current provision • Can go to teachers about problems • Everyone cares in current provision • Teachers don't get angry or shout in current provision • Nicer teachers in current provision • Teachers teach you what you need to know in current provision • Teachers in current provision were willing to listen • Teachers help learn and exceed in what pupil likes doing
Mental health needs	Poor emotional wellbeing in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angry in mainstream school • Felt unable to deal with mainstream school • Mainstream was not a happy time • Anxiety stops attendance • Coping mechanism was to log out and not engage in mainstream school • Missed year 10 of school due to mental health difficulties • Missed school due to hospitalisation • In denial about emotions when attending mainstream
	Developing coping strategies for MH in AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved tolerance in current provision • Currently happiness is a lot higher than the hardest time • Became better at dealing with anxiety • Started to understand cause of anxieties • Seeing people to support with anxiety about school • No longer feels higher levels of stress • Was able to go to school rather than being in room depressed

	Behaviour in mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggled with behaviour in mainstream • Was involved with police due to hurting another student • Walked out classroom in previous school if it got too much • Naughty in mainstream • Pupil set off fire alarms in previous mainstream school • Reckless • Could become non-cooperative if stressed and disagreed with teacher • Refused to engage with bad teachers in lessons in mainstream • Got sent out for zoning out in lessons in mainstream • Hyper behaviour due to ADHD in mainstream • Kicked out of lessons in mainstream
Process of exclusion	Negative impact of exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Started to get depressed in mainstream • Emotional trauma connected to school • Mental health issues • Tried to take own life four times • Sleep difficulties due to stress and anxiety • Pupil previously sectioned • Mainstream school was stressful nearly every single day • Having breakdowns every other day in mainstream school • Felt stressed as unable to relax in mainstream • Would feel on verge of suicide in non-ideal school • Would go to sleep when got home from mainstream school • Unable to concentrate as could not relax in mainstream school • Things tip me over the edge • One event could affect everything for that pupil • Exclusion made pupil feel weak • Did not want to be out of school when attending mainstream • Pupil felt his education was on the line • Parent was getting angry about exclusion • Found it hard to settle in new provision as had not been at school for a while • Did not want to start new provision • Nervous about starting new provision
	Exclusion as a relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felt good about leaving mainstream • Felt it was good to be kicked out of a bad school • Happy about leaving mainstream • Managed move was alright apart from the chosen school • Should have got rid of me sooner
	Attendance difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend current provision most of the time • Do not like attending school • Unwilling to go to school • Sometimes do not attend current provision • Ideal school would be no school at all • Did not want to go to school • Went to a mainstream school for one month • Struggled to get to mainstream on time • Felt a sense of accomplishment about attending provision • Did not go to school for a while • Became behind due to missed school in mainstream • Missed 6 months of school • Missed a month of school in previous mainstream school • Missed two months of school in mainstream year 6 • Was not in school much in year 10 in mainstream • Spent year 9 at home

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was previously sat at home doing nothing • Later start to day reduced stress in current provision • Only allowed to attend school for two hours a day in previous mainstream
	Lack of provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not have a school to go to after being sectioned • Lots of mainstream schools did not want pupil to go when applied • Head Teacher trying to work out what to do after pupil being asked to leave • No work while searching for new school • Can choose any school due to statement
	Delayed diagnosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism noticed in year 9 • Did not get the diagnosis of ADHD in time • Would have still been in mainstream if had the diagnosis of ADHD in time
	Reasons for exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Got kicked out by Head Teacher from mainstream as he found uncompleted homework behind radiator • Got kicked out in year 10 • Kicked out due to reputation • Something happened with another student to cause exclusion in mainstream • Got caught vaping in mainstream • Parent took pupil out of school • Left mainstream due to assaulting another student • Managed moved from first mainstream secondary • Waiting for an excuse to kick me out • School asked pupil to stay at home
	Process of exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found meetings about exclusion really stressful • Multiple meetings with Head and parent about exclusion • Pupil stuck in the middle of meetings over exclusion • Pupil trying to cope with exclusion • Feel like he should have moved to provision earlier to have a better education • Parents argued the school had not put necessary things in place • My education was on the line • Completed a trial at new school while on roll at provision
The future	Uncertainty about the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid thinking about the future • Unsure about future • Lack of control about future • Unsure of what college entails • Unsure how long he will remain in provision • Staying in provision for sixth form • Would like to stay in current provision until at least year 10
	Future support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like to be better considered for work experience • Support teacher for future college placement • College should support by teaching skills needed • Need someone teaching him the roles in employment • Unsure of how college could support needs • Provision supported with future at college

Appendix O. Ethics approval form gained from UCL

Institute of Education



Ethics
Application
Form:

Student Research

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

For further support and guidance please see accompanying guidelines and the Ethics Review Procedures for Student Research <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/studentethics/> or contact your supervisor or researchethics@ioe.ac.uk.

Before completing this form you will need to discuss your proposal fully with your supervisor(s). Please attach all supporting documents and letters.

For all Psychology students, this form should be completed with reference to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics and Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Section 1 Project details			
a.	Project title		Exploring the experiences of school exclusion for pupils on the autism spectrum
b.	Student name		Laura Gray
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor		Vivian Hill & Liz Pellicano
d.	Department		Psychology and Human Development
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD/MPhil	<input type="checkbox"/> EdD <input type="checkbox"/>
		MRes	<input type="checkbox"/> DEdPsy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		MTeach	<input type="checkbox"/> MA/MSc <input type="checkbox"/>
		ITE	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Diploma (state which)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other (state which)	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.	Course/module title		Thesis
g.	If applicable, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.		N/A
h.	Intended research start date		May 2017
i.	Intended research end date		May 2018
j.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If research to be conducted abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk and submit a completed travel insurance form to Serena Ezra (s.ezra@ucl.ac.uk) in UCL Finance (see guidelines). This form can be found here (you will need your UCL login details available): https://www.ucl.ac.uk/finance/secure/fin_acc/insurance.htm</i>		England
k.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?		
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	External Committee Name:	
	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 2	Date of Approval:	
If yes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application. – Proceed to Section 10 Attachments. 			

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 Project summary

Research methods (tick all that apply)

Please attach questionnaires, visual methods and schedules for interviews (even in draft form).

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interviews | <input type="checkbox"/> Controlled trial/other intervention study |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Use of personal records |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires | <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic review ⇒ <i>if only method used go to Section 5.</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action research | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary data analysis ⇒ <i>if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Observation | <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Literature review | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, give details: |

Please provide an overview of your research. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, your method of data collection (e.g., observations, interviews, questionnaires, etc.) and kind of questions that will be asked, reporting and dissemination (typically 300-500 words).

Aims

This study aims to explore the experiences of school exclusion for pupils on the autism spectrum. With legislation emphasising the importance of inclusion, more autistic children and young people are being educated in mainstream schools (DfE, 2014). Previous research has shown that autistic individuals have additional needs that need to be supported within mainstream provisions. Pupils on the autism spectrum may have difficulty with the seemingly chaotic and unpredictable nature of mainstream school, the abstract language used by teachers, unplanned changes and noisy and disruptive classroom environments – especially at secondary school (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Makin et al., 2017).

Consequently, many pupils on the autism spectrum report negative experiences of mainstream school. They also experience alarmingly higher rates of exclusion compared to their typically developing peers; 21% of students with ASD are excluded from school at least once (Barnard, Prior & Potter, 2000; NAS, 2003).

Yet, official figures of exclusions are also underestimated as they do not include illegal exclusions and managed moves. Managed moves were introduced as a positive planned alternative to exclusion, where a child is instead moved to a new placement or provision in a planned way that is believed to be beneficial to the school, parents and the child (Vincent, Harris, Thomson & Toalster, 2008). While exclusions – and potentially also managed moves – can be detrimental to a child or young person's mental health and future outcomes, there is remarkably little research on the impact that they have on children and families, or indeed on the strategies to minimise the exclusion of autistic children and young people from school.

This study therefore aims to explore young autistic people's experiences of exclusion from their perspective alongside the perspective of their parents, their teachers and other professionals. Listening to the voice of these young people is vital to gain an understanding of how they experienced exclusion and where they feel their needs were met or could have been met more effectively. This first-hand knowledge will contribute to our knowledge of the experiences of exclusion for young people on the autism spectrum and help inform ways to support these young people on the autism spectrum in mainstream education.

Research Questions

What are the school exclusion experiences of young autistic people, from the perspectives of young people themselves, their parents and teachers?

What are professionals and local authorities doing – and what can they do – to support the inclusion of young autistic people in mainstream schools?

Research Design

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews

This research will involve individual, face-to-face sessions with 12-16 young people aged 12-18 years with a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Condition who are attending an alternative provision for secondary school aged children in one local authority in England. The sessions will either be conducted in the young person's school or their home setting, as appropriate.

The first session will be a 20-25 minute session to provide key background data which will include the Wechsler Abbreviated Scales of Intelligence - 2nd edition (WASI-2; Wechsler, 2011), as a measure of intellectual ability, and the Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory (PedsQL), which examines their quality of life in four domains, physical, emotional, social and school functioning.

The second session will include a semi-structured interview (approximately 15-20 minutes). The semi-structured interviews will include a life grid activity and drawing the ideal school. The life grid has a visual element which helps engage young people in the process of constructing and reflecting on life history. It has been used in previous research with young people, and created a more relaxed research encounter supportive of the respondent's voice and helped to facilitate the discussion of sensitive issues, both of which will be important factors in the current study (Wilson, Cunningham-Burney, Bancroft, Backett-Milburn & Masters, 2007). Drawing the ideal school technique is derived from drawing the ideal self technique (Moran, 2001) based on Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955). The drawing the ideal school technique has been used with young people on the autism spectrum in previous research to identify the most important features of school provision to the pupils (Williams & Hanke, 2010). The activities and questions used will explore their experiences of school exclusion and their views about their previous mainstream setting and their current provision.

This research will also involve face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the parents of the young autistic people, their current teachers in the pupils' current provision and, where possible (and with the permission of the families involved), their teachers or special needs co-ordinators in the pupils' previous mainstream schools. The semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents will last approximately 20-30 minutes and ask questions about their child's educational experiences in both mainstream and/or alternative education (dependent on the respondent) as well as their experience of exclusion.

I will also seek to conduct semi-structured interviews with Educational Psychologists within the local authority and local authority professionals about the current provision in the county for those who have been excluded or undergone a managed move. They will be asked about their experiences supporting pupils on the autism spectrum who are at risk of exclusion and the provisions put in place by the school or county to support these pupils.

Questionnaires

Parents will be asked to complete the following questionnaires:

- A background questionnaire to report on diagnostic history (5 minutes)
- The Social Communication Questionnaire – Lifetime version, a screening tool for autism (10 minutes)
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to explore the behaviour of the pupils in 5 different domains, including emotional distress, behavioural difficulties, hyperactivity and concentration, peer difficulties and pro-social behaviour (5-10 minutes).

These questionnaires will provide more information about the participant's behaviour and autistic traits which may contribute to our understanding of their experience in education. If any of the participants need help reading the questions on either questionnaire, the researcher will read out each question for the respondent to ensure accuracy in the answers.

Section 3 Participants

Please answer the following questions giving full details where necessary. Text boxes will expand for your responses.

a.	Will your research involve human participants?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 4
b.	Who are the participants (i.e. what sorts of people will be involved)? Tick all that apply. Teachers, children, children with special educational needs		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Early years/pre-school <input type="checkbox"/> Ages 5-11 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ages 12-16 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Young people aged 17-18	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown – specify below <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adults <i>please specify below</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Other – specify below	
	NB: Ensure that you check the guidelines (Section 1) carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES).		
c.	If participants are under the responsibility of others (such as parents, teachers or medical staff) how do you intend to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study? (Please attach approach letters or details of permission procedures – see Section 9 Attachments.)		

	<p>To obtain permission to recruit young people on the autism spectrum, permission from the Head Teacher will be provisionally sought. Following this, information sheets and consent forms will be sent out to the parents of pupils on the autism spectrum to ask if they are willing to take part in the research for pupils aged 16-18 and their parents. Parents of the young people aged 12-16 will be given two consent forms; one to consent to their child's participation and one for their own participation. Following this the young people aged 12 to 16 will be given pupil-friendly information sheets and consent forms about the research. The research will be explained verbally to the young people prior to the commencement of the study.</p>
d.	<p>How will participants be recruited (identified and approached)?</p> <p>Head Teachers of the alternative provisions within the county will be contacted via phone or email and asked for their participation in the research. Once consent for participation is gained from the Head Teacher, school staff will identify relevant students who fit the criteria for the study; those with a diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition and who have experienced a permanent exclusion or managed move from a mainstream provision and now attend an alternative provision in the county. Young people identified and their parents will be provided with information sheets and consent forms for the study. Parents will be able to notify the school or myself (or my supervisors) if they are interested in the study and will be given the contact details of the researchers should they require further information about the study before deciding whether to take part.</p> <p>Once parents and young people on the autism spectrum have offered their participation to take part in the study, the Head Teachers or school staff of the alternative provisions will identify those staff members who currently teach these pupils in the alternative provisions. I will give an information sheet and consent form to the Head Teacher to pass on to these staff members identified and staff members will be told to email me or let the Head Teacher know if they are interested in taking part in the research.</p> <p>The information on the pupil's previous school will be obtained from the parents. The Head Teacher of these schools will then be contacted by phone or email to provide information about the study – only if the parents and young person are happy for me to do so. Once the Head Teacher has provided consent for the research to take place in their school, the Head Teacher or SENCo will provide information about who was involved in the participants schooling when they attended there. The individuals identified will then be provided with information sheets and consent forms to take part in the current research. SENCos will be asked to collect consent forms.</p> <p>Information about the study will be sent out to all Educational Psychologists in the county to ask whether they will be interested in taking part in my research. Those who respond with an interest in taking part will be sent a consent form to complete and asked to give back to me in person.</p>
e.	<p>Describe the process you will use to inform participants about what you are doing.</p> <p>All participants will be given detailed information sheets and consent forms about the study and asked to return these to the Head Teacher or the SENCo at the educational provision or contact the researcher directly if they are interested in taking part in the research. The young people in the study will be explained the study verbally to ensure they understand what their participation in the study will involve. Consent forms will also contain contact details of the researcher and the research supervisor to ensure participants can ask any questions about the research.</p>
f.	<p>How will you obtain the consent of participants? Will this be written? How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time?</p> <p><i>See the guidelines for information on opt-in and opt-out procedures. Please note that the method of consent should be appropriate to the research and fully explained.</i></p> <p>Participants will be provided with a consent form with the information sheet to sign. This information sheet will state that participants can withdraw their consent or participation at any time. During interviews, participants will be told they can stop the interview at any time should they want to. Young people on the autism spectrum will be given a break card to use should they require a break and a stop card to use if they do not wish to continue with the research.</p>
g.	<p>Studies involving questionnaires: Will participants be given the option of omitting questions they do not wish to answer?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>If NO please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.</p> <p>Participants will be encouraged to answer all of the items on the questionnaire and, where they find this difficult, to give their best guess. If they prefer not to answer various items, they will be assured that they can stop taking part at any time.</p>

h.	Studies involving observation: Confirm whether participants will be asked for their informed consent to be observed. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If NO read the guidelines (Ethical Issues section) and explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8. N/A
i.	Might participants experience anxiety, discomfort or embarrassment as a result of your study? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If yes what steps will you take to explain and minimise this? If not , explain how you can be sure that no discomfort or embarrassment will arise? <p>I will be asking young people and their parents to share their experiences of educational provisions and the young people's previous exclusion from school. For the young people this may be uncomfortable as they may talk about difficulties they have previously experienced in their education as well as negative emotions felt during these experiences or when being excluded or managed moved from a previous school. For parents this may also cause discomfort as they discuss previous negative educational experiences of their child and their emotions felt about their child being excluded or managed moved from a mainstream school.</p> <p>I will try to reduce any level of anxiety, discomfort or embarrassment experienced by participants during my research. I will use a life grid activity which the young people which has been useful in previous research when talking about sensitive topics with participants to reduce discomfort (Wilson et al, 2007). I will also use a balanced interview schedule which asks participants about both positive and negative experiences in both the pupil's previous and current educational provision to focus on some positive aspects of their/their child's educational history. I will closely monitor the participant's emotional responses and offer breaks where I feel necessary. The researcher will observe non-verbal cues and if a</p>
	<p>young person or parent becomes upset during the interview I will ask them if they would like to stop the interview.</p> <p>The researcher will spend time in the provision before the interviews take place to build rapport with the pupils and so they feel more comfortable with the researcher. The researcher will also meet the young person to complete the WASI on a separate occasion which will help with the young people's familiarity of the researcher when discussing these sensitive issues. The interviews will take part in a safe environment for the pupil and parents, either at their child's current educational provision or their home where they feel comfortable.</p> <p>As pupils on the autism spectrum may experience difficulties with social communication which could cause them distress I will carefully consider the methods I am using to gain this information to ensure the pupil can communicate in meaningful ways. I will provide the participant with space and time to answer questions and give them the option of not answering questions at all. I will also give the pupils opportunities to leave the room using a break card as well as provide them with the opportunity to end the interview with a stop card.</p> <p>I will remind the young person or parent that they do not have to share any information that they may feel uncomfortable sharing and they can withdraw from the study at any time. I will also remind participants that all their data will be anonymised and information will not be shared with others, except if they share information which I believe means they may be unsafe. I will brief and de-brief participants about the study. I will provide participants with both me and my supervisors' email addresses should they wish to contact us for further information. Should parents require further support about their young person's needs or support provided to them I will give them information about additional services available in the county.</p>
j.	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants (deception) in any way? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	If YES please provide further details below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
k.	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If NO please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
l.	Will participants be given information about the findings of your study? (This could be a brief summary of your findings in general; it is not the same as an individual debriefing.) Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If no , why not?

Section 4 Security-sensitive material

Only complete if applicable

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c.	Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

Section 5 Systematic review of research

Only complete if applicable

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) and if you have answered No to both questions, please go to **Section 10 Attachments**.*

Section 6 Secondary data analysis Complete for all secondary analysis

a.	Name of dataset/s	
b.	Owner of dataset/s	
c.	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <i>If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?</i> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Are the data anonymised?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Do you plan to anonymise the data?</i> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Do you plan to use individual level data?</i> Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Will you be linking data to individuals?</i> Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
e.	Are the data sensitive (DPA 1998 definition)?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
f.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>
g.	If no , was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>
h.	If no , was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>

* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

*If secondary analysis is only method used and no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to **Section 9 Attachments**.*

Section 7 Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a.	Confirm that all personal data will be stored and processed in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA 1998). (See the Guidelines and the Institute's Data Protection & Records Management Policy for more detail.)	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

* If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are below.

c.	Who will have access to the data and personal information, including advisory/consultation groups and during transcription? The researcher, Laura Gray, and research supervisors, Liz Pellicano & Vivian Hill
During the research	
d.	Where will the data be stored? The data will be stored on password protected documents on my personal computer where only I has access.
e.	Will mobile devices such as USB storage and laptops be used? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> * No <input type="checkbox"/> * If yes, state what mobile devices: Laptop, recording device and USB storage * If yes, will they be encrypted?: Yes, we will use encrypted USB storage to transfer data (including audio recordings).
After the research	
f.	Where will the data be stored? The data will be stored in password protected files on my personal computer
g.	How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format? The records will be destroyed after 5 years.
h.	Will data be archived for use by other researchers? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> * If yes, please provide details.

Section 8 Ethical issues

Are there particular features of the proposed work which may raise ethical concerns or add to the complexity of ethical decision making? If so, please outline how you will deal with these.

It is important that you demonstrate your awareness of potential risks or harm that may arise as a result of your research. You should then demonstrate that you have considered ways to minimise the likelihood and impact of each potential harm that you have identified. Please be as specific as possible in describing the ethical issues you will have to address. Please consider / address ALL issues that may apply.

Ethical concerns may include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Methods - Sampling - Recruitment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International research - Risks to participants and/or researchers - Confidentiality/Anonymity |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gatekeepers - Informed consent - Potentially vulnerable participants - Safeguarding/child protection - Sensitive topics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disclosures/limits to confidentiality - Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection) - Reporting - Dissemination and use of findings |

Informed Consent

Participants will be provided with detailed information and consent forms. The information sheets will state that participants can withdraw their consent or participation at any time. During interviews participants will be told they can stop the interview at any time should they want to. The research will be explained to the young people on the autism spectrum verbally at the start of the interview to ensure they understand what is involved. They will be given a stop card to use if they do not wish to continue with the research. All participants will be provided with details to contact myself or my supervisor should they require further information about the study. Consent for pupils aged 12 and 16 on the autism spectrum will be gained from both themselves and their parents due to their age. ESCs and PRUs will be asked if they feel participants aged 16 and 18 will be able to consent for themselves and if so they will not require parental consent alongside their own consent. The child/young person friendly information sheet will be verbally explained to the pupils on the autism spectrum to ensure their understanding and will be told they do not have to take part in the research.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants will complete a consent form which includes their name and a code. The code will then be used on questionnaires, audio recordings, assessment tools and written activities to ensure anonymity. All consent forms will be kept in a locked drawer in a desk separately from the laptop which will contain the audio recording. Questionnaires, assessment tools and written activities will only contain the participant's code and be kept separately from the consent forms so participants are unable to be recognised. When the research is written up participants and schools will be given codes and so will remain anonymous. The local authority and names of the schools will also remain anonymous in the write up and the researcher will ensure information that would identify the schools is not included in the write up.

Data Storage and Protection

Data including audio recordings, questionnaire scorings, WASI scores and scanned written activities, will be stored on encrypted files on a laptop which is password protected and transferred using encrypted USB storage. All interviews will be recorded on a dictaphone (with the participants' permission) and will be deleted once they have been uploaded to an encrypted file on a password protected computer before leaving the interview room. All files will be saved under the participant's code name. All recordings will be deleted from the recording device once they have been uploaded on to the encrypted computer.

Potentially vulnerable participants

Interviewing pupils on the autism spectrum may present them with a challenge due to their social communication difficulties. Activities will be used to reduce some of the social demands placed on individuals during an interview. Semi-structured interviews will be carried out in an appropriate environment and the interviewer will be sensitive to their needs. Questions will be worded carefully to ensure there is no misinterpretation of language. These pupils will be given a red card they can use if they would like to leave the interview at any time and a break card in case they need a break from the interview. If participants would like a parent/carer or staff member present for the interview they will be allowed to have someone with them. The researcher will closely monitor the young person's wellbeing and ensure additional breaks are offered where deemed necessary.

Sensitive Topic

Some participants may show signs of distress when talking about school exclusion. These participants will be debriefed and I will also inform a relevant staff or family member if a pupil has demonstrated distress. Participants will be provided with both my own email address as well as the email address of my supervisors should they wish to contact us for follow up support. Parents and teachers of these pupils will be fully debriefed and parents will be given information on further support services for parents of pupils on the autism spectrum if required.

Section 9 Further information

Outline any other information you feel relevant to this submission, using a separate sheet or attachments if necessary.

Section 10 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

a.	Information sheets and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research, including approach letters	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Consent form	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
	<i>If applicable:</i>		
c.	The proposal for the project	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
e.	Full risk assessment	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Section 11 Declaration			
		Yes	No
I have read, understood and will abide by the following set of guidelines.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BPS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BERA <input type="checkbox"/>	BSA <input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please state) <input type="checkbox"/>
I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that to the best of my knowledge: The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.			
Name	Laura Gray		
Date	04.05.2016		

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor.

Notes and references

Professional code of ethics

You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:

[British Psychological Society](#) (2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, and (2014) *Code of Human Research Ethics*

or

[British Educational Research Association](#) (2011) *Ethical Guidelines*

or

[British Sociological Association](#) (2002) *Statement of Ethical Practice*

Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/ethics/>.

Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE. Further information can be found at http://www.ioe.ac.uk/studentInformation/documents/DBS_Guidance_1415.pdf

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

Further references

The www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk website is very useful for assisting you to think through the ethical issues arising from your project.

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.

This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* Bloomsbury.

A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, you may refer the application to the Research Ethics and Governance Administrator (via researchethics@ioe.ac.uk) so that it can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A Research Ethics Committee Chair, ethics representatives in your department and the research ethics coordinator can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the Research Ethics Committee.

Also see 'when to pass a student ethics review up to the Research Ethics Committee':
<http://www.ioe.ac.uk/about/policiesProcedures/42253.html>

Reviewer 1

Supervisor name	Liz Pellicano
Supervisor comments	Laura has thoroughly considered the ethical issues raised by her research.
Supervisor signature	

Reviewer 2

Advisory committee/course team member name	Vivian Hill
Advisory committee/course team member comments	This submission reflects careful consideration of the ethical issues associated with the study
Advisory committee/course team member signature	

Decision

Date decision was made	25/05/2017
Decision	Approved <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Referred back to applicant and supervisor <input type="checkbox"/>
	Referred to REC for review <input type="checkbox"/>

Recording	Recorded in the student information system <input type="checkbox"/>
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Once completed and approved, please send this form and associated documents to the relevant programme administrator to record on the student information system and to securely store.

Further guidance on ethical issues can be found on the IOE website at <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/ethics/> and www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk